No 22

T. E. Rapp Jr.

K. E. Rapp, Jr.

To K. E.

from

Nancy and Dick

Xmas 1930.

FLYING TO AMY-RAN FASTNESS

FLYING TO AMY-RAN FASTNESS

By E. J. CRAINE

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THE SKY BUDDIES
SECRET OF CUZCO
ETC.

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This fourth book of the Flying Buddies is "chock full" of excitement from beginning to end. The buddies are threatened with death by the appearance of a poisonous snake in their plane; they visit a marvelous underground palace and they witness a man-made volcano eruption which saves their lives.

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FLYING TO AMY-RAN FASTNESS

I

AN ATTACK

"What do you think you are in, a comic strip?" demanded Bob Caldwell of his Flying Buddy, whose face was registering an odd variety of expressions as he stared through a long telescope.

"No. I'm looking for the bridge of San Luis Rey," his step-brother, Jim Austin, answered.

"If there was such an animal you couldn't see it from Cuzco, you goop, it was supposed to be at Lima," Bob retorted.

"Ain't you the bright little first-grader! Been reading up?"

"Not guilty. I believe in the talkies and I asked Carlos. He informed me that the bridge is pure fiction for every school child in Peru knows that the ancient fibre bridges constructed by the Yncas wore out faster than a pair of paper pants and that the Indians who could keep them in repair were exempt from taxation."

"Those Indians should have had their walking delegate organize a strike among the bridge weavers. Wouldn't it have changed the whole history of this old New World?" Jim put down the glass and gazed at his brother. "Just the same, old man, this is a marvelous section of the globe. Almost as good looking as Texas along Cap Rock."

"And a lot hotter. Home was never like this. Here comes your dad."

"Well, Buddies, you need not wait any longer. Peter and I decided that we shall not fly to the construction camp today. We have many things to do here, and the trip can be postponed. Carlos will drive out and attend to what is necessary for the present."

"All right, Dad," Jim grinned. The three Texans were standing on one of the many balconies of the De Castro home, which they had reached, after several adventures that might have put them permanently out of any enterprise, two days before, in good time to forestall the activities of the brothers Alonzo, who were mighty anxious to gain control of the new project.

"Any objections to our taking a hop into the cool heights, sir?" Bob asked quickly. The Flying Buddies had been grounded for twenty-four hours and it seemed like a very long stretch.

"Not at all. But, you must be careful. From your description of the rocks of Amy-Ran it does not seem possible that young Arthur Gordon can have escaped with a whole bone in his body, but he may have friends who will take it upon themselves to avenge him, even though you are not responsible for his death. From what we already know, he is, or was, a part of a powerful, very determined organization which works ruthlessly," Mr. Austin said gravely.

"We'll be careful, Dad. But there isn't a

chance that he could climb down those rocks clear to the bottom without a rope. There are wide stretches of it that are as smooth and bare as my hand, not a thing to grab hold of or step on."

"I can't see why in heck anyone should want to take it out on us," Bob put in. "Great guns, we didn't touch him and he can't blame us because he couldn't kill the pair of us, and Carlos too. Why Dad, they swung that lariat and had us hog-tied before we even knew it was coming, then they were going to shoot us—Arthur had his gat in Jim's face—it wasn't his fault that it wouldn't go off and blow us into slivers. Wow, I'm glad I wasn't awake to watch the show."

"It is all very difficult to comprehend, but I am certainly grateful that your two Vermont acquaintances happened to be touring around the vicinity. I suppose they had an airplane also."

"Suppose they did, Dad, but it was all over so quickly that I couldn't take in many of the details. And speaking of outlaws, don't you forget that those Alonzo lads are

sore as bears who have been scrapping with a porcupine. They won't take their punishment without trying to get in a lick at you if they see a good chance," warned Jim.

"It is unfortunate that they were admitted into the enterprise, my boy, but I am sure they are both too astute, too anxious to keep in a position to make big money to consider anything that would jeopardize their freedom and fortunes," the man explained. "If they were to commit any act, however small, which warranted us asking for their resignation, that would arouse the suspicions of other men who are in business with them and probably result in their being voted out. No reputable firm would consider carrying men whose reputations are questionable. That is a business law, unwritten but absolute. When you get a bit older, bear it in mind."

"We will," Jim promised, "but you be careful just the same. We will, even though we are sure that young Gordon is as dead as Noah."

"Come along, Buddy," Bob urged. "Up with the 'Lark' is my motto."

He started to his room for his flying togs, and Jim raced after him equally eager to get into the air in the wonderful little plane which had been presented to them only a few weeks before by Don Haurea, whose ranch, the Box-Z, was adjoining the Austin K-A along Cap Rock in Texas. The gift had been made at Christmas, shortly after their own beloved bus, Her Highness, had been mysteriously brought down in flames as Bob was returning with the mail from Crofton.

"At any rate, we can let the sheriff know, when we get home, that Gordon is out of his jurisdiction," Jim remarked as they dressed, then he added, "Still got that mask in your pocket, Old Timer?" Bob picked up his flying coat, fished about and finally drew forth the cap, which seemed to be made of nothing but gauze.

"Wonder what good it would do?" Without waiting for a reply, he slipped it over his head, drew it down to his shoulders. In an instant the texture of the thing changed, it stood out as if it were a small transparent balloon, but air-tight. He took several deep breaths and was astonished that the

air was cool and quite comfortable. "What do you know about that!" he exclaimed as he took it off.

"Work all right?" Jim inquired.

"Seems to, but I wonder what it's made of and why it isn't full of tubes and things?"

"Wish we'd had time to ask Don Haurea what the principle is, but if it keeps off gas, it's a great invention. Too bad the Don doesn't hand it over to the government," Jim answered. Caldwell folded the mask and stuck it back into his pocket.

"Probably he will if there should be a war and the country should need them badly. The ones they have now are reliable enough for mines and places where they are likely to be needed. We're in luck that he gave them to us, but Great Scott, we won't need them, Buddy. I say, that was funny your Dad speaking about our 'Vermont friends'; if he knew what good friends Corso and Yncicea are, and how much they have helped us, he'd get brainstorm trying to figure it out. I nearly do myself, sometimes, but we have been getting their 'scientific methods' in small doses, like climbing a

pair of stairs. These rings sure have helped. I bet that old Indian woman at Amy-Ran the other day is one of the crowd in some way, or she knows them. She looked as if she was ready to sic the cat on us, but all she did was say, 'go in peace!' Queer how they managed to keep that piece of land. Wonder how big it is and what will happen to it when she dies, it—"

"Hey, sign off," Jim protested. "Think you're a filibuster in the legislature?"

"Gee, I was kind of wound up," Bob grinned good-naturedly. After that they devoted themselves to dressing and were soon ready.

"Wish Carlos would come along, but he isn't so keen about flying over the Andes after the other day. Seems to prefer seeing them from the hammock," said Jim, then he added softly, "As a pair of prize boobs you and I take the cactus codfish balls. We must be near that South American Central Control station the Don told us about."

"Gosh, that's right. From somewhere around here perhaps they can run the 'Lark.'"

"They won't do it unless we get into trouble, but I shouldn't mind seeing how she flies by herself."

"Didn't it take us from the K-A to the Box-Z Christmas morning? Need another demonstration? If we should run into young Yncicea again, let's ask him, but every time that kid looms up things are too hot for much conversation," Bob laughed.

"Come along." Ten minutes later they were in the huge open barn where the plane was parked. The Sky Buddies went over the "Lark" carefully, not forgetting to make sure that there were no stowaways to pop out and make trouble. That had happened when they were flying over the Caribbean Sea when a dwarf who had slipped in during the night had came out en route to Belize. He had nearly sent the three of them to Davy Jones' locker, but after a fierce fight, had dropped down into the fog himself and disappeared.

"No unwelcome passengers," Bob reported.

"Instruments, etcetera all correct," Jim added. They climbed into the forward cock-

pit, Jim taking the pilot's seat, and presently they went rolling out onto the smooth courtyard.

"Let's go and see if the Pacific is still there. We don't get a look at much ocean in Texas and I kind of like those whopper waves," Bob proposed.

"All right, suits me," Jim agreed. He opened the throttle, the plane leaped forward and a moment later was climbing swiftly into the skies. Caldwell adjusted the speaking tube so that they could talk together if they wanted to, and prepared to enjoy himself.

"It's good to be up again, Old Timer," he announced.

"You bet. Since we are not going to stay long we'll be able to see more of the country," Jim answered. They climbed almost to the ceiling before he leveled off and shot toward the coast. Beneath them lay smooth straight roads that looked as if they had been built with rulers. Two huge rivers met just beyond the town and rushed furiously down the steep grades. Here and there was a low marshy strip of land, soon spurs of

the mountains jutted abruptly, or lay in giant layers and rolling terraces. Amost everywhere they could see great stretches of foliage, bright with huge blossoms, and as they neared the sea line they passed over a belt of hot desert.

"And they have snow at Cap Rock," Bob said.

"Sure. No summer clothes on the way back," replied Jim. "I say, Buddy, you may not get much in the way of waves, unless you count fog. Look at it coming in."

"I've been watching it. Down toward the south it looked clearer. Head that way and maybe we can get away from it."

"Aye, aye, Captain." Jim changed the course. "Those orchards surely look mighty attractive. We don't want to forget to take some movies before we have to start north. It will be great to look at them when we are rubbing our chilblains."

"Let's do it now!" Bob proposed.

"The camera's in the rear cock-pit and you are here."

"That's so. Well, fly easy and I'll climb along the fuselage."

"G'wan," Jim objected.

"Don't be a kill-joy. You needn't go very fast and I'll crawl. Great guns, I piloted for you when you were doing a Cartier with that Jack Dempsey of a dwarf!"

"Your chute O. K.?"

"Sure, and me trusty gas mask is in me pocket," chuckled Bob. He began to unbuckle his safety strap. "See if you can fly as well as I, kind sir, and I'll take a grand snap of the back of your noble bean."

"I'll take a grand slam at your noble beak," Jim retorted. He reduced the speed, examined the instruments, and assured that all was well, adjusted the reflection mirror so that he could watch the progress of his step-brother, who began climbing over the back of the seat. Caldwell didn't attempt to do any walking but pulled himself forward carefully until he reached the rear cock-pit. There he unlatched the cover, folded it up, and dropped into the seat. It took him only a few minutes to get himself settled and secure, then he slid the camera onto a standard, and busied himself getting it adjusted.

"All's well, me hearty," he announced to Jim.

"Want to go high or low, over land or sea?"

"Low over the sea, and the land too, but don't let the 'Lark' stub her nose on the Andes." As they were still a distance from the coast line, Jim looked about for attractive spots, and proceeded to pilot the machine toward them. When he glanced into the mirror he could see Bob cranking away industriously. Usually the camera was carried in the forward cock-pit, but on the way from Texas, Mr. Austin, who had occupied the rear seat, had used it several times and it had never been replaced. Just then the light flashed that Bob wanted to speak to him, so he connected the tube.

"All right, Old Timer. Getting what you want?"

"Yes, pretty good. I'm going to keep this connection with your ear in case I need to give you a bawling out—"

"I'm going to cut the wire," Jim interrupted.

"Don't. See that ravine, the narrow one

with just a little stream dropping over the rocks?"

"Sure, it will make a corking picture and you can get the orchard up on the plateau. That what you want?"

"Go to the head of the class, me lad." Jim carried out instructions, then further ahead he saw a huge rock with dozens of birds resting upon it. He wondered if he could get close. He wasn't going high enough to shut the motor off and glide, but he proceeded steadily forward and the birds rose in a great cloud.

"Pshaw," he grumbled.

"Atta boy. I got the whole gang," Bob chuckled into his ear.

"Gosh, I thought I'd scared them too soon."

"Now, fly high, wide and handsome, and see if you can find me some seals on an island," Bob urged.

"You don't want much."

The "Lark" began to climb and her nose was turned more toward the ocean and both boys were delighted that the fog was being rapidly dispelled. It left a fantastic pano-

rama of motion, so Bob took a few feet of that, and finally he saw a long rock where several seals were sporting themselves as if for an audience. Caldwell cranked away, occasionally grunting in disgust, or exclaiming with satisfaction. Further down the coast Jim noticed some rugged cliffs which came out into the water, and the waves dashed against them, sending up great clouds of spray. He headed for it, and curved around; then Bob spoke softly into his ear.

"Is that slide on the communication tube behind you shut, old man?" Jim glanced over his shoulder at the round hole which was the mouth of the opening through which small things such as sandwiches and the coffee bottle could be passed back and forth from one cock-pit to the other.

"No. We never closed it after the night the dwarf tried to smother Dad," he answered. "Why?"

"Sit tight and close it easy." Jim complied but he was mighty puzzled at the request. Then he noted something tense in his stepbrother's tone.

"It's fast, now what's on your mind, Old Timer! Out with it."

"There's a snake in that communication tube." The words were spoken as if the younger boy were being choked.

"What kind of snake?" demanded Jim. He knew perfectly well that Bob was in earnest.

"I don't know, haven't been introduced, but it's a good-sized one."

"Headed your way?"

"Yes!" Jim glanced into the mirror and he could see Caldwell's white face as he sat barely moving a muscle.

"If I dive sharply will that slide it down so you can drop the lid?"

"I don't beleve so. It's got its head four inches out of the hole. Don't climb. That might flip it right out onto me."

"I won't. Can't you hit it with the crank, or something?"

"Don't dare move!'

"Sit tight, old man." Jim tried to speak cheerily, but made an utter failure of the job as he realized the danger his buddy was facing. Quickly his eyes swept the cock-pit

in search of some means of helping, but there wasn't a thing, and his brain was absolutely empty of ideas. Into his mind came the recollection of the efforts to prevent their reaching Cuzco, and then he recalled in a flash that Mr. Austin had intended to fly with them to the camp. They were waiting for him when he told them Carlos was going to drive out, and he would make the trip another time. Someone had hidden the snake in the tube expecting it to come out and poison the man. Jim shook himself impatiently at the futility of his thinking. Bob was likely to be struck any minute by the murderous forked tongue while he sat strapped helplessly in his chair.

"Has it come any further?"

"A little. Don't dive, it will drop right through the door, it's heavy enough, I think." He spoke jerkily.

"I'll look out. Is there a lariat under the seat?"

"No. Carlos and I used them this morning and did not put them back."

"Whew!" The only knife Jim had was a fragile affair good for sharpening pencils

and it had but one blade. It was absolutely useless. Mechanically, but swiftly, he freed himself from the safety belt, all the while his eyes traveled over the control board, from one dial and indicator to another, until he could have recited each register. Then he glanced ahead, set the "Lark's" nose so that she would have all the space in the world, not an obstacle within miles, and leaped quickly onto the top of the fuselage. Bending low, and stepping cautiously so that his footfalls would not alarm the snake, he made his way back as fast as he could. He had no idea what he could do, but it was imperative he do something to save his pal.

Bob sat as if he were carved out of stone, his lips set grimly, one hand held the speaking tube pressed against his mouth, while the other rested on the camera. It was apparent that, as he was taking the pictures he had turned his head and saw the reptile emerging toward him.

For a moment Caldwell could hardly realize that his eyes were not playing tricks on him, but the sleek brown head and the bright shining eyes soon confirmed their reality.

The boy knew little about snakes, he had always disliked them thoroughly, and now it flashed into his mind that his best chance of escape was by keeping absolutely still. He had no doubt that the thing had not crawled into the communication tube of its own volition, nor did he think for an instant that it was a harmless specimen. Its forked tongue probably contained the deadliest of poisons. It was not his reason which kept him motionless, but stark fear. After he had told Jim of its presence he wished he had kept still, but his idea had been that the beast might go sliding out into the forward cock-pit, and closing the cover would prevent that. Cold chills ran up and down his spine, he felt his hair raising under his helmet, and he tried desperately to think of something he could do to protect himself and his buddy. The safety strap holding him fast was an added handicap, but very slowly he brought down his hand toward the buckles in a wild hope that he might have a chance to fight for his life, even though his chances of winning were nil.

Fascinated, he watched the head extend

into the cock-pit, closer and closer to him, waving slightly as if on an observation tour. Twice it went far in the opposite direction and each time he took advantage of the movement to get his hand nearer to the belt. By that time he was dripping with a clammy perspiration, every muscle in his tensed body was strained and aching. Then, to his horror, he saw Jim coming toward him crouched on the fuselage. The "Lark" was headed out to sea with no one at the controls.

II

THE FIGHT

Jim knew a little more about snakes than his step-brother did. As a youngster he had snapped the heads off the small black ones and he had captured rattlers with forked sticks, but outside of a Zoo he had never seen one as big as this fellow who was slowly emerging from the communication tube and waving its head experimentally about the cock-pit. He hadn't a weapon available, even his shoes were soft-soled, but one thing he did know was that a large snake must get its tail coiled about something before it can strike. If he could get it to draw back into the hole he might jam the cover down and imprison it, but he could think of no way of accomplishing that without placing Bob in even greater danger. Bending forward, his eyes followed every move, his body

swayed and he had to hold tightly with one hand to the brace or he would be forced down by the wind. Out of the corner of his eye he did see that Caldwell was moving his hand toward the safety-strap buckle. If he could get loose, he might jump for it, but at any moment the snake might lash that tail out and around something firm, then dart the head forward like a streak of lightning.

It seemed to the boys as if time itself had stopped and they were inanimate objects suspended in space. The snake slowly drew itself out until its tail dropped a few inches from Bob's feet, its head rose leisurely toward the rim of the cock-pit until at last it was higher than the wind-break. The wind jammed it hard toward the seat and then, faster than the eye could follow, the huge creature flung itself upward, its tail whipped around the brace back of Bob, whose stiff fingers fumbled frantically with the strap and got it open. Glancing at Jim, he saw his step-brother still standing tense and alert, so he dared not move.

"Lower yourself in the seat," Jim di-

rected, making his lips form the words so they would be understood. Slowly Bob slid down and forward until at last his head was below the level of the cock-pit, then he dared to turn. He saw the snake coiled the length of the brace, its head waving close to the roof of the wing. Then he noticed that Jim was moving toward the forward cock-pit.

"He's going to get in and close the lid," Bob whispered eagerly.

There was a lever in each cock-pit by which the covers could be brought down and secured. Once safely inside, they could fly home and if the snake clung fast, it could be shot. With a whistle of relief he tried to work his own, but he had to get the camera out of the way, and he couldn't do that without standing up. All his fear returned and it seemed to him as if his body were as lifeless as an old sponge. Helplessly he watched Jim move forward, inch by inch. As he went, he straightened gradually to his full height, then, suddenly Bob shrieked in terror.

"Jim, don't!" for he saw Austin jump up and down, wave his arms, and tear off his

helmet, which he tossed into the air. With the speed of a bullet the lithe body flung forward, the tail coiled like a spring about the forward brace, and a furious hammering followed which made the "Lark" quiver from one end to the other. Sick with terror Bob's face was close to the indicator board in front of him, and he saw the light flash brightly. Mechanically he took up the tube to listen.

"I'm locked in, Buddy. Strap yourself tight. Can you get that lid down? The big boy is sprawled across my roof, looking ahead of me."

"I'll get it down," Bob chattered.

"Good, then shut yourself in. I'll keep the light on as long as he isn't looking your way, but if I let it off, he's turned, and you duck quick," Jim called.

"All right." Bob raised himself cautiously, glanced forward, could see the snake just as Jim said, stretched almost full length, its tail coiled about the brace. It was more good luck than good management that enabled him to haul the camera down, then with another quick glance ahead he pressed

the lever with all his strength, just as the snake coiled and moved back over the fuselage. The light went out, but the cover was fastened.

"Make it, Buddy?" Jim snapped tensely.

"Yes." That was all Bob could say, for his stomach felt as if it were floating around loose in his body and a horrible nausea assailed him. Bravely he tried to fight it off, but to no avail. He gagged and strained helplessly.

"I'd like to get this fellow to the plantation. Let's sprint that way, Old Timer."

"Good." Caldwell got that much out and Jim was reassured. The "Lark's" nose was turned about, she climbed swiftly, leveled off, and raced at her topmost speed toward the coast, and Cuzco. Although Jim looked often he could not see the horrible stowaway, but finally he made out the dark body circling the brace.

In less than an hour the plane soared over the plantation. Jim sounded his whistle to warn his father of their approach, then sounded it more furiously to let him know they wanted help. As the great orchard

rolled into view he could see several men running toward the long court, then he glided slowly down to a landing and stopped. Mr. Austin and their host started to meet him, but the boy taxied the "Lark" away, swinging it around until he thought they could see why he didn't lift the lid. This astonished the men, then someone saw the snake beginning to glide to the fuselage. Two minutes later a sharp shot rang out, then Mr. Austin came to the door, and the boy raised it.

"Where did you get that?" the man asked in horror.

"It came out of the communication tube," Jim replied. He saw the dangerous thing still writhing on the ground, and a second later it lay motionless.

"Either of you hurt?"

"No, sir." Jim jumped out, then he noticed that there was no movement from the rear cock-pit, and in three strides he reached it. In a moment he had lifted the lid, and there was his Flying Buddy slumped into an unconscious heap.

"Was he bitten?"

"I don't think so." Jim raised his pal's head. "Guess he just caved in," he choked. "Buddy, Bob, Old Timer—"

"Yes—" It was very faint, but it was a response.

"Did you get bitten?"

"No," and he sank back again into a faint.

"Fetch him right into the house." Pedro De Castro issued half a dozen sharp orders, one right after the other, and as many men jumped to obey. Bob was carried tenderly into the house and put to bed. Amost before that was accomplished, the plantation doctor was standing beside him, listening to Jim's account of their experience, his fingers pressed professionally against the patient's wrist.

"He said he did not get bitten?"

"Yes. That's all we got out of him."

"I will examine him and make sure. What kind of snake was that, do you know?" was the next question.

"No, I don't," replied Jim.

"It's one of the venomous species they find on the coast," Mr. De Castro answered. "It's amazing it did not crush the plane."

"They are all poisonous. Had he struck the boy he would be dead by now," the doctor told them.

"Well, w-what do you suppose is the matter with him?" Jim demanded.

"It was a trying experience! Very! Very! Enough to make iron men turn to jelly. A little quiet and absolute rest will restore him. You must have nerves of extra quality to have piloted the plane home."

"I didn't get such a dose of it as Bob did," Jim explained.

"Doctor, are you quite sure that there is nothing more serious the matter with the boy? He is my step-son, but he is—I should like you to be perfectly frank and not try to conceal anything," Mr. Austin said gravely. "If he is in the slightest danger I want to get his mother here as quickly as possible. Our home is in Texas."

"Some distance to bring her. We doctors have a great responsibility. Young bodies stand an amazing lot of suffering and even shock; then, again, puff, when you think you have the matter well in hand—out they go and you are helpless. It is a great distance

to fetch your wife. I shall make an odd proposal. Among my friends is a scientific man —not a practicing physician or surgeon—I should like to consult him, if I have your good permission." He had Bob's hand resting on his own palm, and as he spoke his eyes lingered over the green emerald on the boy's still fingers. Jim noted the glance and spoke quickly.

"Sure, Dad, let him get the man as soon as he can. If the two agree that the danger is not great, we needn't send for Mom. It would be an awful trip for her," he urged.

"A man who is not a practicing physician—" Mr. Austin hesitated.

"You can get your friend more quickly than you can a regular doctor, can't you?" demanded Jim. As he spoke he took the doctor's arm below the elbow and his own green ring was in plain sight.

"Much more quickly," the doctor assured him.

"That's the idea, Dad. Then if Bob doesn't show signs of improving we'll get all the M. D.'s in Peru," Jim persisted eagerly. Although there was no sign of a green stone on

the doctor's hand ,or any place else for that matter, Jim had a hunch as big as a house, that the man knew that sign and that, like many others who had seen the ring, he was ready to render the best possible service to the boy who wore one. Jim himself had been treated by an unrecognized doctor and under his care had recovered marvelously from gun wounds he had received when the Gordon gang attacked the Box-Z ranch and turned a machine gun on the house. Now the boy was positive that the plantation doctor's friend must be one of those superscientific men and he was mighty anxious that his Sky Buddy should be under such care.

"Very well, my boy, but we don't want to waste any time."

"We won't, Dad." Then he turned to the doctor who was busy with the patient. "Can I fetch your friend in the plane, sir?"

"That will not be necessary. He will be here presently. I shall communicate with him at once. He hasn't far to come, fortunately."

"Fine," Jim declared enthusiastically and

his fears for Bob were quickly changing to assurance of his speedy recovery.

"I will telephone, then, if you will leave me with just one to assist, we will set to work." After that hint, the doctor and one of the men servants were left to the task. Jim went up to change his clothes, but he couldn't get rid of the memory of his Flying Buddy as he looked facing the snake. He hurried with his toilet, then made his way dully to the portico where he found his father and Mr. De Castro gravely walking up and down the flower paths.

"Well, Jim, how do you feel?"

"Great, except that I'm not sure I have any insides." The boy tried to smile, but now that the affair was over, his knees had developed an odd sensation, and wobbled like a pair of broken crutches that barely held together. He hadn't thought of it before, but now they all seemed a beastly long way from Texas. If he could just open his eyes in his own room, hear the birds singing or listen to the winds howling, he didn't care what, so long as it was home. He brought his jaws together with a determined effort but Mr.

Austin noted his white face and trembling hand.

"You are not well—"

"Yes I am Dad," Jim insisted, but he did not refuse the comfortable chair which Mr. De Castro shoved quickly forward, and he even swallowed the glass of something his father put into his hand. "Trouble is, I was thinking while I was changing my clothes. The unusual mental exercise just naturally drew heavily on the rest of my anatomy and made me sort of floppy. I'll give my brain a good rest—a couple of months."

"My dear young man, you are—" Mr. De Castro was deeply concerned at this diagnosis of his guest's condition.

"Don't get worried, Peter, that is merely a typical United States' boy's way of admitting that he doesn't feel exactly up to par," Mr. Austin said hastily. "You have been thinking of Bob and were a bit overwhelmed?"

"That's it—washed out. Has the doctor's friend arrived?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"That's good." Jim was relieved.

"We have been discussing the affair, my boy, but if you do not feel like talking about it, we'll wait."

"I'm on both feet again, Dad, thanks. Want to know more about it?"

"Yes."

"We are trying to fathom the mystery of how the snake got into your airplane," Mr. De Castro told him.

"I can't answer that. Do those snakes just meander around loose in this part of the country?" Jim wanted to know.

"They do not. I have never seen one so high before, but they are not uncommon in the uninhabited sections along the coast where it is very warm," came the answer.

"Then it didn't crawl into the plane." He gave them a detailed account of the snake's appearance, and when he had finished the two men exchanged glances.

"I shall have every man, woman and child on the place closely questioned and find out, if we can, who went near the plane. I have a man guarding it now, and shall continue to do that. It looks bad, very bad."

"I think it was put in there for you, Dad.

We are all going to fly, naturally you and Mr. De Castro would be in the back seat, and whoever put the snake in intended that it should come out when it began to get hungry. Bob and I took the 'Lark' up alone and earlier than it was expected we would go. Probably this was Mr. Snake's first ride in an airplane, his sleep was disturbed and he got up to investigate. That's why he wasn't in more of a hurry," Jim explained.

"You can treat such a matter lightly?" Mr. De Castro eyed the boy in astonishment.

"Why not," Jim smiled. "The scheme was almost a flat tire—" Then his face grew sober. "But I'd like to know who thought it up, and who carried it out. I'd like to wrap him, or them, in a nice long boa that hadn't eaten in a week, just so they could appreciate what corking ideas they get."

"When we get him, his punishment shall be swift," Mr. Castro promised. "Now, I would suggest that you take things quietly for the day, and when tomorrow comes you will be quite yourself. I regret that Carlos is not here to entertain you properly, but, if you feel like walking about the plantation,

one of my trusted men will accompany you."

"Thank you, but for the present I guess I feel more like loafing," replied Jim.

"That's the best plan, my son," Mr. Austin declared.

So the rest of the day was passed quietly, and the next morning, Jim looked in at his Flying Buddy whose face was still almost as white as the pillow. His eyes were closed and his lips were drawn. Austin's heart skipped a beat at the sight of his pal and he started to tiptoe away.

"Good night, old slick-foot," came a soft chuckle, and Jim whirled around to see Bob grinning broadly.

"Good night yourself, but I'm getting up, not going to bed," Jim retorted with relief, for if Bob could joke, it was a good sign.

"Did we bring our stowaway home?"

"We surely did and he met a couple of bullets," answered Jim.

"He was out of luck, poor goop. Bet he didn't like airplaning any better than we liked having him along. That's what a snake gets when he associates with humans. Know how he got passage on the 'Lark?' "

"No. The De Castros are still grilling their servants, and the crate is under guard," Jim told him. "How you feel?"

"Like an empty shell. Hollow to my toe nails," Bob replied.

"I'll see if I can scare you up something to eat."

"Atta boy, then I'll have a nap." He yawned and closed his eyes again so Austin went down to ask if he could have something to eat.

"Of a certainty," the doctor replied. "It shall at once be seen to, and I think it is well if he talks not much today."

"I'll keep away from him," Jim said. He ate his own breakfast, which was a movable feast in the De Castro household, by himself, for only a few of the family were astir, then he went out on to the shady balcony where he knew that the English newspaper would be left. He glanced over the items, which were not very up-to-date, and then a white clad servant came to him.

"The telephone, sir."

"Guess you want my father."

"No sir, the calling party requests to

speak with young Mr. Austin," the man insisted, so Jim went to find out who wanted him.

"Hello," he called and a boyish voice replied.

"You will not pronounce my name, please. Hello, Jim Scout—"

"Hello yourself. Gosh, I'm glad that you called up." He knew at once that it was Yncicea Haurea, the youngster he had last seen on the great rock of Amy-Ran, and he hoped that he would get a chance to see the boy again.

"Bob Scout is well doing?"

"Fine, thanks."

"My uncle and I are at the Inn. I learned of your difficulty, not in the usual way, and perhaps you would visit us today. We are not stopping long in Cuzco."

"I'll be glad to see you. What time—"

"Now?"

"All right, that is, as soon as I let my father know where I'm going. Where shall I meet you?"

"We shall see you as you approach. Ac-

quaint your father that you will spend the day, or will that be too long?"

"It won't for me, but I'll see if Dad wants me for anything."

"A yard in length," Yncicea chuckled, and Jim laughed heartily.

"So long, you mean." He hung up the receiver and went to look for Mr. Austin who was in the portico. "Good morning, Dad. That boy we met in Vermont just telephoned. He's in Cuzco and invited me to spend the day with him."

"I think that is an excellent plan, my son. You will probably have an opportunity to see some of the sights of the city."

"Sure that you do not need me?"

"Quite sure. And it will be as well to let Bob rest. I am greatly relieved at his improvement."

"You watch your step, won't you, Dad? Don't put your foot on a snake or lean back on one," Jim urged.

"I shall try not to. Enjoy yourself and be careful, my boy."

III

AN EXPLOSION

As the De Castro limousine drew up in the wide courtyard of the Inn, young Austin recognized his two friends quietly approaching. Into his mind flashed the picture of the first day he had seen them at his aunt's farm in Vermont. Then they had kept to themselves and looked rather odd because of their unconventional dress, but now no one would give them a second glance for they were like any well-to-do pair of tourists from the United States who had no desire to attract undue attention to themselves. To be sure a close observer would have put the boy's age at least three years more than it actually was for he was as tall as Jim.

From his infancy Yncicea had received an amazing education in the research labor-

atories built and jealously guarded by his fathers and forefathers back some hundreds of years to the time when his race was almost exterminated by a ruthless horde of brutes who went mad at the sight of great wealth. A keen admiration swelled into Jim's thoughts for that pure-blooded handful of men and women who had dared to band themselves together, protect a portion of their own land, and hide their enormous riches from the conquerors; then, from generation to generation develop themselves until they were physically, mentally, and scientifically hundreds of years ahead of the rest of the world and of the people who regretfully looked upon them as lost in the great melting pot of mixed blood.

"Glad to see you again, Jim," Corso said cordially extending his hand, which Austin accepted gladly.

"I am glad to see you," he replied, then added. "I was thinking what a string of adventures Bob and I have gone through since that day on the Island in Lake Champlain."

"When you became the possessor of some green emerald rings," Yncicea smiled and

a mischievous light danced in his fine dark eyes. "Do you regret becoming the owner of a token which marked you as one to be hounded and followed by an organization determined to ferret out the secret of kings?"

"Not on your tinted daguerreotype three times enlarged," Jim answered. "Good heavens, man, the charm began to work when Her Highness drank all her gas and dropped me and Buddy on the forbidden Box-Z almost under Don Haurea's nose. Before that life was flat, stale and unprofitable."

"Since that you have had experience with all kinds of snakes?"

"I'm broadcasting the facts. Shall I send the car back?"

"You will not need it."

Jim signaled the chauffeur that he could return home at once, and then the three made their way leisurely through the crowds until they came to a roadway, where another car stood waiting. Corso spoke a few words to the man and presently they

were all in their places, the two boys in the rear seat.

"I am glad there is no alarm about Bob," Yncicea opened the conversation.

"He had a good cave-in after the battle. I didn't know it until I reached the plantation. The last he said to me was that he was all right, and when I saw him in a heap it took the starch out of me."

"Meaning that it made you supple?"

"That's it, but if I said 'it made me supple' most people would think that I was speaking a foreign language. It's great to spend the day with you, and I'm mighty glad that you didn't shoot right away from Peru. We can't stay very long. Dad wants to finish up a business enterprise, then fly north if Bob is able to go. Now, you tell one."

"I have accomplished sufficient so that my father consented when I asked his permission to hammer asunder and take a holiday," announced Yncicea soberly. Jim looked at him in bewilderment, then laughed.

"You mean knock off for a day?"

"Very true. I delight myself that I have

stored in my mind many of your most expressive phrases but I only occasionally express myself as aptly as you do."

"Don't give up the ship; you're doing fine —great."

"Thank you. I feared that you would think me very backward," the boy grinned, then his face became more serious and he added, "You are traveling now over a part of the globe which a few hundred years ago was one of the finest nations in the world." Jim looked out at the beautiful landscape.

"It isn't exactly hard on the eyes now," he declared. On both sides of the smooth road stretched wide fields and orchards, plantation homes, prosperous looking farms. In the distance the rugged Andes rose in magnificent piles which mounted higher and higher until their snowy peaks were lost in the horizon.

"The mountains are ever the same, they cannot be despoiled. The plantations by the roadside reveal only their best side, but every mile has its suffering, poverty, uncleanliness and struggles. Five hundred

years ago this whole land was far more densely populated than it is now. Every fertile inch was under cultivation. Irrigation systems which still puzzle the world's engineers carried sufficient water to all sections and were distributed evenly. There was no poverty, little disease, no pestilence, no rats; the people sang about their work, their history was committed to memory and handed down in song and poetry. A broad highway, greater than those built by the early Romans, extended along the coast four thousand leagues, from what is now Quito in Ecuador almost to the Straits of Magellan, with a branch to Cuzco. It went level over hills, valleys and deserts. The forests were full of rare woods, the mountain ranges white with grazing llama, the traveler was a guest when he stopped on the road, which was lined with beautiful flowers, seats and overhanging with magnificent trees. There were hundreds of enormous buildings, lovely fountains, baths, statuary, storehouses from which all could draw, and laws which assured every man comfort and justice."

"I've read a little about it," Jim said quietly.

"The temples were looted, rooted up for their treasure; the rare woods burned to make charcoal, the great roads blown to bits, the guideposts in the deserts chopped down for firewood, thousands of people were burned, butchered, or driven naked before the cannon. In ten years the secrets of fine arts were lost, valuable workmanship was melted into mere lumps of gold and silver, whole provinces were depopulated. Every month millions of dollars were sent to Spain to pay the Royal-fifth, while princes here were shackled in slavery, tortured by great dogs trained to rip them to pieces, starved and beaten to death by Christians." Yncicea spoke quietly and impersonally.

"Those early birds were a hot bunch," Jim volunteered gravely.

"They were. It was not until their work of destruction was complete that any effort was made to remedy the evil, then it was twenty years too late. However, among those first invaders there were a few real Christans, but their influence was not sufficiently

great to combat the destructiveness of the men in power. At that time Spain was actually being governed by a boy of sixteen and a woman who was recognized as mentally deficient. Now," he broke off quickly, "we will never progress if we try to live in the past. Dwelling on it a little we can profit by its mistakes, but today is a holiday. We are going to enjoy ourselves in an unusual way. If you look ahead you will see that we are going to drive over a natural stone bridge. The water forced its own way underneath long before any man dwelt in the land."

They were driving along the course of a swift river and beyond the highway curved sharply and climbed a steep grade. The car slackened its speed in order to give Jim a good view of the marvel. The water was wide and dark, so he was sure that it was deep, and it dashed by in swirling pools. He could see what looked like a wall of the mountain and about ten feet from the top was an enormous opening, like a giant fish's mouth, through which the river came tumbling.

"That's wonderful," he exclaimed.

"It is one of the great masterpieces of nature," Yncicea replied.

"I hear an airplane," announced Jim and for once he was genuinely glad to be on the ground for after all he never could get the full beauty of the country while soaring at a mile or more a minute hundreds of feet above.

"A plane is coming. You will see it in a moment," Yncicea answered.

"If you are a close observer you will see several things within the next few minutes," Corso added.

"What is it?" demanded Jim.

"One must never spoil a show by revealing the plot," Yncicea replied and he would say no more. "We will stop on the top of the bridge so that you will get a look at the water." The car sped on, taking the curve smoothly, there were very few on the road, and soon it stopped again close to the edge of the great table rock. Jim looked down and could see the water, which was truly deep and seemed to carry hundreds of silvery fish that darted close to the surface.

"Gee, that's great. Looks inviting to a fisherman or a swimmer."

"A swimmer would have to be very strong even to go with the current."

"It certainly isn't oozing," Jim admitted. He was wondering what he was to see next, but after they crossed the bridge the scenery was not extraordinary, although it was beautiful. He could hear the airplane sailing toward them and glancing up over his shoulder he saw the speck in the clear sky and noted that it was one of the comparatively late models.

"There are two men in it, a pilot and an observer, and their glasses have been trained on us since we left Cuzco," Yncicea volunteered.

"On us?" Jim questioned.

"Yes. I am rarely seen in this part of Peru, but when I am they favor me with constant attention, for they are sure that I must be going to visit the spot where great treasure is hidden, then they will descend upon the place and secure it for themselves," the boy replied.

"Great heavens. Do they think it is as easy as all that?"

"They realize that it will be difficult, but we have a leap in advance of them, Jim Scout—"

"You mean a jump ahead?"

"Sure. We usually know what they are doing although frequently they give us a surprise party. Is that right?"

"Surprise party is correct," but Jim couldn't laugh this time.

"I am progressing. A surprise party, like the one they staged at the Box-Z when they did some damage."

"They did and then some, but I say, do they think the treasure is scattered from here to Texas?"

"One thing they learned that it is the policy of my people to have depots distributed, and where they locate a man working as my father is working and living in Texas, they favor him with their attention, expecting to out-maneuver him, take possession of what he has, including records which will reveal the complete system."

"If they did—say, get the Box-Z in Texas

would they get the key to the whole works?" Jim asked anxiously. It seemed like a mighty weak system if that were possible.

"Should they overpower any station they would not get enough to buy themselves a cup of coffee all around."

"Wow," Jim laughed. "Why don't you let them get one just for fun?"

"I do not know, but I think it is more fun keeping them trying."

"Guess it is, but why don't those people, that organization, whoever it is, tell about the whole scheme, I mean the ancient race and its development and everything?" Jim wanted to know.

"Because, Jim Scout, that is information which they do not possess. They believe that vast treasure was hidden hundreds of years ago, that the secret of its whereabouts was handed down to a few descendants, who are a mixture of the white race, and they have learned through one means and another picked up here and there, of families who seem to have unlimited means, as my great-grandfather did in Texas. These bits are pieced together, like a cut-out puzzle, and

they think they have the whole design except a few scraps, which they are working for now."

"Yes, I see."

"Of late years the movement to acquire it has been greatly enlarged, but only a few of the head men really know, or think they know, what they are after. Several, like the man Dyke who was killed when he tried to kill you and Bob at the old dam, and Burnham, who was caught with Gordon senior at the Box-Z, get an inkling of the size of the treasure and they start working by themselves. That is always a good thing for us, because such men kill each other off in order to reduce the size of the share."

"Great little game, isn't it? I say, we are blowing off a lot of smoke. Something the matter with your gas?"

"No. We are trying to assist the men in the plane. You see, down the hill in front of us the road forks."

"Yes, I see. One turns up sharp and the other curves a little off the straight course. Want them to be sure which way we go or are we just giving them a joy-ride?"

"Nothing so tame as that," Corso chuckled.

"I give up." Austin simply couldn't see any advantage in leaving a roll of smoke in the car's wake, nor did he think it a good idea to try to conceal themselves in a smoke screen, for that could also be followed and seen clearly from the sky. They were traveling now through a thickly wooded section but where the road forked there was little foliage of any kind and it could be seen for a mile ahead. The car picked up speed, raced down the incline, turned swiftly up toward the mountains, continued as fast as it could go, smoke streaming out behind.

"Is the plane following us now?" Yncicea asked casually. Jim examined the sky, and at first could not see it at all, then he picked it out as it raced off into the distance.

"They are going back," he exclaimed. "Guess they gave up."

"Perhaps they did." The chauffeur slowed down and in a place where the road was very wide and the ground at each side almost as hard as if it were packed, the smoke stream was shut off, he turned quickly and

they went back a mile, turned again into a thick wood where the car was completely hidden from sight; not even an airman could have located it unless he flew very low. They waited about two minutes, then they heard the muffled roar of an automobile engine as it raced along swiftly. There wasn't another car on the road, and as it sped by, Jim noticed that three men sat in the rear seat, leaning forward eagerly; the driver bent close to his wheel, and a fourth man was in front. None of them glanced either to the right or left, and they were going so fast they were soon a speck in the distance. Then the car came out onto the road again and Austin chuckled with appreciation as he realized that they were trailing their trailers. While they kept the advanced car in sight, they made no attempt to catch up with it, and about five miles further on the chauffeur drove over a field, followed a winding way among a number of great boulders, which reminded the boy of jagged Cap Rock, climbed a long grade until finally they came onto a winding ledge from which they caught glimpses of the road below.

Presently they were running neck and neck with their own pursuers, and Jim was getting so excited he simply could not sit still. He looked in every direction, and over his head but saw nothing which would give him an inkling of the outcome of the race. He whistled softly as he tried to figure what would happen and the only thing he could think of was that soon their own chauffeur would turn off and leave the other car to discover that it had lost its prey. It was obvious that the short cut they were taking was not known for there was no sign of a road, and only a man who was exceptionally familiar with the route could have gotten through the rocks onto the ledge. By that time the car slowed, then stopped.

"This will be a two ring circus " Corso announced softly.

"Where are the rings?" Jim wanted to know. He looked down through the high foliage and could see the highway which ran straight for a quarter of a mile, then curved and a short distance on went over a light wooden bridge which was railed on both sides. Beneath was a rocky declivity and a

long strip of boggy land. The section seemed deserted, then the boy saw a car coming swiftly and recognized it as the one they had let pass them. The men, he could see, were still leaning eagerly forward, and one of them blew the horn as if to warn anyone driving in the opposite direction. Then Jim saw a movement about the end of the bridge, some one came from beneath and ran as fast as his legs could carry him until he was out of sight.

The car did not slacken its speed and Jim thought it must be a pretty old model or else its engine was not a particularly good one, for it made nearly as much noise as an airplane. On it came, turned the corner in a wide curve close to the outer edge and rushed forward, but to the commotion was added a sudden, desperate grinding of brakes, as if they were jammed on hard, but they were of little use for the machine slid forward almost to the bridge. At that moment there was a dull boom, a great spluttering, then a bang as something exploded and the end of the bridge was ripped from its foundation, the automobile turned a com-

plete somersault backwards, its passengers went flying in every direction and dropped in grotesque heaps all over the place. Some of them lay still, while others struggled to get themselves free.

"Holy smoke," Jim gasped. Why—"

"That is a little surprise party they arranged for us," Corso told him. "They expected us to drive along, the bridge would blow up, and we'd go out, not permanently, but enough to let them take us prisoners and relieve us of valuables and papers. The weak spot in their scheme was that they telephoned their man at the bridge to set it off when he heard the car coming. They expected to be right *behind* us. The chap carried out their directions and *they* got the full benefit of it."

"Wow." By that time another car was seen racing up the road, but it slowed down before taking the curve, half a dozen men jumped out and ran to the wreck. Then followed a conglomeration of exclamations and a vigorous storm of swearing. The victims of the accident who could move, were jerked none too gently to their feet, and a

few minutes later a half a dozen rattling good fist fights were under way.

"The second car must belong to men of the same gang," Jim gasped.

"It does. They came to make sure that their companions-in-arms did not make way with the spoils, so the disappointment is general. Sorry we haven't time to referee the fights, but we must proceed," Corso explained. The car was started quietly, wound its way forward, and presently returned to the road several miles beyond the bridge, while Jim tried to convince himself that he was wide awake and not having a beastly nightmare.

IV

THE EMERALD TEMPLE

Half an hour later the car again turned off the road, followed a barely perceptible route which Jim decided must be a part of an old plantation highway, and in ten minutes stopped close by a bramble-covered ruin of what had once been a high stone wall.

"This is where we take the car ahead," Yncicea announced. The three of them alighted and when Austin looked about him he saw that they were in a deep basin whose sides were overgrown with a thick tangle of matted vines which clung to rocks, trees and stumps and presented an appearance of being absolutely impassible.

"Can't see where we can get aboard anything bigger than a tooth pick," he declared.

"That is well. We have made a first class job of the end of the road if a way out escaped your keen eyes," Corso said softly. They stepped out of the way in order to permit the automobile to back, which it did without deviating from the track it had made getting in. Austin watched it disappear around the curve and in a minute it might have been miles away for all the noise it made.

"If you will follow me. Put your feet down with care," Yncicea invited. He caught hold of a strong swinging branch, placed his own foot on a protruding point of glistening stone, drew himself up lightly to a second step, then bending forward he parted the branches and proceeded until he was walking on a narrow moss-covered ledge.

"Can you make it?" Corso asked.

"Sure, and I'll try not to leave any trace of the way."

Jim caught the branch which Yncicea had released and followed the leader. The man came close on his heels. Soon he was beside the younger boy and he stood a moment to glance about. They were standing in what

might be called a natural hallway cleared through the vines which, when he examined them closely he could see were skillfully woven to give them the appearance of nature's handiwork, and so thorough was the intertwining that no movement they might make could be observed from outside. The moss under their feet was as thick as rich carpet and although they seemed to be confined in pretty close quarters the air was delightfully cool and the place was as light as day.

"Come." Yncicea said softly. He stepped forward quickly and Jim proceeded with him, while Corso brought up the rear. The hallway lead them by a winding route, as if it were going among deep, irregular crags, and frequently the boy ahead parted long slender tendrils which carried out the impression that the way was not clear. At other sections they climbed over sharp rocks and twice they had to stoop almost double to keep from bumping their heads on projecting stones.

"Stop and catch your breath," Corso invited finally, and Jim was glad of the oppor-

tunity. He filled his lungs and let it out with a soft whistle.

"Jinks, this place is mighty light," he remarked.

"Yes, it is. Are you standing firmly on your feet?"

"Sure—" The word was hardly out of his mouth when the place became almost as dark as pitch, the air hot and stifling, heavy with the odor of long-decaying vegetation.

"Does that seem more natural?" Corso asked him.

"Wow, yes—whew—" A soft breeze fanned his face and the darkness changed slowly to the light. "Expiring Liberty bonds, how did—you do that—how the heck do you get natural light?"

"It is a complicated subject, but if you will ask my father when you return to the laboratory, he will be delighted to have you add it to your store of knowledge. When we reach our destination—we will speak of my father again—there is something he would like to discuss with you. Shall we proceed?"

"Sure, this gets more interesting every minute," Austin declared enthusiastically.

He had, at various times in his life, gone through sections of the Cap Rock and other mountains which were so heavy with trees and underbrush that the sun never penetrated to the earth, so now he fully appreciated the fact that a marvelous lighting and ventilating system was operated in this wild fastness. He wondered what it was Don Haurea wanted discussed with him, but he was too busy keeping up with the Don's agile son to ask any more questions. Suddenly the passage curved sharply and stopped abruptly before a tall, smooth stone which looked very like the formation of those he had seen standing like ancient sentinels at Amy-Ran.

Yncicea pressed his hand against the surface and the great mass was pushed outward easily as if it were made of paper. The boy stepped forward, glanced back to see that Jim was close, and at last the three paused together on a great shelf and the rock behind them slid gently back into its place. The air was cold but before Jim could take a step, Corso laid a hand on his arm.

"Step carefully, this is slippery." As Jim's

feet began to do a tread-step under him, as if it were slick ice, he knew that the statement was no exaggeration.

"Greased pigs, I'll say it is," he panted when he was at last able to keep his skull from going where his feet should stay. He looked ahead, then gasped again. "Have I got some kind of willies, or is that water?" he demanded.

"We are behind a waterfall," Yncicea answered.

"And I'm here without a bathing suit," Jim lamented.

"You do not need one," Yncicea assured him. "This fall is very beautiful when you get above it."

"I've seen a lot of them when flying, but I certainly never expected to be alive on the wrong side of one. Most people do not do it, and I think, when I'm writing my diary, I won't mention it. Some of my descendants might get hold of it sometime and think there was a streak of insanity in the family, or I was doing an Ananias on a really big scale," Jim announced soberly.

"Do you keep a diary?" Corso asked him.

"Sure. I keep four of them. Get one every Christmas from my aunt in Vermont. They have real leather covers and I keep them right in the box tied with the Merry Christmas ribbons," he answered soberly.

"Their blankness will be a great disappointment to your biographers," Corso remarked with a smile. "We'd better not linger here any longer."

"I haven't anything to bi-og."

Jim was looking about him now and could see the great opening in the rocks over which the water was tumbling. Yncicea started toward the left and presently stepped into a cave-like tunnel which they followed for about ten minutes then came out into the real sunshine. They were standing now on a ledge, or a sort of mouth which seemed to be high in a craggy spur of the Andes. Austin drew his breath sharply and never in his life had he felt so small as he did standing there amid the vast panorama of mountains. Some distance below he could see a small lake so clear the floating clouds were reflected in its depths. Everywhere the rocks rose sharply, like thousands of spires, and

as far as he could see they were cut almost perpendicular, as if some giant hand had slashed them without rhyme or reason, until an intricate pattern was fashioned.

"Here is the car ahead," Yncicea announced.

"Welcome to our city. Watch us grow." Jim tried to laugh, then he said, quite seriously, "Mind if we rest soon! I've only got one brain and I shouldn't like anything to happen to it before I get home."

"We'll rest in a few minutes. There's a place which will not tax your capacity. It will take only a short while to get there. Close your eyes if you do not want to see anything more," Corso advised.

"Guess I can stand a little bit without straining too much. Do we get another joy ride?"

"A brief one."

"Where is the taxi?" Jim asked.

"Right here, sir," a familiar voice told him and he whirled so quickly he very nearly sent himself spinning.

"Ynilea, wow-ee! I never expected to see you outside of the Don's lab. How did you

get here?" he demanded of the man who often helped him with his studies in the Haurea laboratories.

"In the taxi," Ynilea replied with a broad grin and a sweeping gesture which made Jim look beyond him, then blink.

"Sweet Clementine in Wonderland—what is it—a glider!"

"That's as good a name as any, but it does not have to be shot out of a gun, put on a sling shot, or kicked off a hill. I'm saying that with due apologies to the gentlemen who are making splendid progress with the gliders in modern usage. They have had a great deal of courage to go on with their theories in spite of the fact that few airmen would believe that such a machine could sustain itself without some sort of engine power," Ynilea replied.

"Well, the Lindberghs can pilot them and seem to think them pretty good contraptions," Jim declared.

"Charles Lindbergh has done more to successfully promote the sciences in which he is interested than many men of history. Added to that, he enjoys the distinction of

being the most universally loved and admired individual the world has ever known. His ability is appreciated during his lifetime. But we should not linger here, Jim."

"I'm willing to go on, but I don't mind telling you that I've seen so much during the past few hours that my brain is beginning to close up like a clam shell."

"After a brief rest its own curiosity will make it open again. Come along." He led the way to the machine, which had a deep narrow body, of some very light weight material. Yncicea and Corso had already stepped inside and made room for the pilot and the extra passengers.

The glider was shaped a little like a very slender boat, the bow curved and raised to quite a high point, from which a fan-shaped arrangement of fine wires stretched to the exact middle of the wing, which was supported by three braces placed with mathematical precision at the bow, the middle and the stern of the airship's cabin. The pilot's seat was something like the ones used on a bicycle, but the others were the folding variety, in a single row. Aft were the instru-

ments and Jim noticed two levers that came up through the floor and he guessed they were controls for a rudder and propeller of some sort. Ynilea took his seat, opened a switch, there was a whirring sound from the rear, the craft shoved along the cliff and went right on, maintaining the same level it had just left. A minute later, it was climbing gently, then it curved, and the boy was amazed at the minimum of effort required to set and keep it in motion. Soon they were traveling swiftly, following a winding course among the crags, and presently it glided down to a landing on a smooth ledge very like the one from which they had started.

"Some flying machine," Jim gasped in admiration. "I'd like to learn more about it, but jinks, wouldn't the world sit up and take notice if it came down on Bolling Field?"

"Wouldn't it?" Ynilea replied. His hand was on a lever and to Jim's further astonishment the wings of the machine operated as if on a set of hinges, coming together in a vertical position. "That makes them less ob-

servable to any eagle-eyed air man who might get this far, also in flying that operation can take the place of banking."

"You can learn more about it later," Yncicea declared a little impatiently. "We are anxious to continue our program, Jim Scout."

"Suits me," Jim replied agreeably.

"How about a rest?"

"If my thinking machine did not crack under that glide ride around these Andes, it is wonder proof. Lead on, Duffy!"

Yncicea strode quickly forward through a tree and vine grown passage not unlike the first one they had entered, but this was very much more elaborate. Every piece of natural growth was developed to the limit and although they were in a delightful garden spot, the rocks, paths and flowers were trained inconspicuously and a pilot flying as low as he dared to overhead would never give it more than a casual glance and would not suspect that a human hand had touched the arrangement. The whole section of the Andes presents a panorama of loveliness and awe inspiring scenes. They are dotted

with tiny lakes, rushing rivers lie like strips of ribbon tossed carelessly among the dense growths, hills, valleys and high plateaus make up a riot of color. The party was moving quickly and suddenly Jim paused to glance around. Directly in front of him were a number of rocks made into steps which descended through some very beautiful flowering shrubs. There was something strangely familiar about the scene.

"I've seen this before," he remarked. Yncicea turned and smiled.

"Yes?"

"Yes, I have. One time when we were in the lab and your father got you on the television screen, we picked you up here. You came down this path," Jim insisted.

"Down this path I came. You have a good memory, Jim Scout."

"Keeka, Keeka—" came a joyous call and two little boys, hardly more than babies, came running to meet them.

"My brothers," Yncicea's eyes lighted affectionately and he hastened down the path. A second later Jim saw him stoop, and when he was upright, each shoulder held a tiny

passenger. "This is Jim Scout. To him you must say, 'hello Jim Scout.' "

"Hello Jim Scout," they repeated in unison and they eyed him gravely.

"Hello yourselves. You look like twins."

"They are twins—"

"Don Haurea! This is like an old home day seeing you all." The two shook hands heartily. The owner of the Box-Z put an affectionate arm on the boy's shoulder and turned him slightly.

"The Donna has been eager to know you," he said, and Jim glanced up into the face of a tall, slender, amazingly lovely looking woman, whose skin was as fair as his own. She had deep violet eyes, a mass of wonderful hair coiled about her head and held securely by a band around her forehead from which a long silk tassel fell just forward of her left ear. Instead of the conventional dress of the modern woman, she wore one of delicate blue silk which extended from her shoulders to below her knees. It was richly embroidered in a design that went around the neck, over the shoulders, and down the front and held together by a wide

belt of thin gold chains studded with marvelous jewels that were set in tiny sections of pearl inlays. Over the whole was a loose sort of wrap made of some delicate material, with full sleeves that fell over her hands.

"I am very happy—" Jim started dutifully remembering his manners, but the phrase sounded trite and inappropriate—"I say, you look as if you just stepped out of a picture—a beautiful one," he declared.

"You are most kind," she laughed a soft sort of silvery laugh. "I am glad for the privilege of welcoming the good friend of my husband and my son. Many times they have told me of the services you have rendered to them, likewise to me—"

"I never did anything for you—" Jim interrupted. She laughed again.

"Is it not the greatest service to save the lives of my dear ones?" she asked, and Jim thought he had never heard a voice that was so charming and musical.

"Well, I suppose so, but Buddy helped—jinks,—Donna Haurea, he did as much as I did, or more. Bob's a great kid—"

"That is so, and I regret that he could not

be with us, but my husband is here for so short a time we thought it would be pleasant to have you pay this visit to us now. Later, when Bob is stronger, we hope he can be brought here. He is doing well?"

"He's getting along fine. He called me a soft-foot when I went in to see him this morning and I know that as long as he can kid like that, he isn't setting his crate's nose toward the pearly gates," Jim replied. "He'll be nuts about seeing this place and everything."

"Nuts?"

"He means that paying a visit to the Emerald Temple will give Bob a great deal of pleasure," the Don explained.

"Ah, I see. How very simple your expression is. Yncicea tries to imitate it and has given me some delightful examples."

By this time they had proceeded slowly along the path and were on a natural stone court across which a tiny stream gurgled as it tumbled between a row of small blue flowers which resembled the forget-me-nots of the north, only they were a deeper shade and the blossoms grew in such masses that

they completely hid their own foliage. Across the court the rough surface of the mountainside rose perfectly straight for ten feet and then projected in an irregular line about three feet until it formed a roof. The whole thing looked exactly like the rest of the cliff, but Jim knew that in some way it had been built by clever men who understood how to design a perfect imitation of the scenery, and the boy guessed that the task had been finished long ago and that the storms, snow, rain, cold and intense heat of time had done their part to carry out the deception with such perfection. He had heard the Don call it 'The Emerald Temple' and having seen the amazing underground laboratory beneath the Box-Z home in Texas, he expected to be shown something very marvelous. As they made their way leisurely, the twins on Yncicea's shoulders, chanted a rollicking little melody, beating their sandaled heels on his chest the while.

Donna Haurea and Jim were leading the way and presently they reached a section of the rocky wall whose surface seemed even more rough than the other parts. Then, two

steps beyond, an oblong of the great mass moved quietly inward several inches, and swung half way around. Although this was not his initiation into such surprises, Austin caught his breath in a quick gasp. Glancing downward he could see nothing more than a section of the stone which looked as if it had been cut with great accuracy; however, near the outer edge there was a narrow rim which was quite rough, as if the workers had sawed to that distance, then the stone had broken off, perhaps by its own weight. As he stepped across, the boy noted that this same treatment had been carried out all about the rim of the entrance, and quickly he guessed that it was a part of the plan of concealment. A very thin straight line would attract the eye of an inspector, while the rough one would not.

"Welcome to our home," Don Haurea said cordially.

"Thank you." Jim looked about him and knew at once that he could never be able to describe all this wonderful inside court contained. In the middle was a pool of clear water fed by four springs which bubbled up

from the stone floor; two of them threw off a thin vapor as if it were very hot, and it was. Here and there were low benches, some of them with high backs, and three were placed beside great stumps, the roots of which spread wide at the base where they disappeared into the ground. On the top were the countless rings of an enormous old tree with bark several inches thick, but when he touched it, he found that it was stone, polished until it was smooth as glass.

"Is this a petrified tree, or stump?" he asked in astonishment.

"No. It is stone worked by some of our skilled men during the later part of the sixteenth century," Don Haurea answered. "We were fortunate to have, among those who were saved from destruction, a few of all classes of artists, including weavers, gold workers, dyers and men who knew how to do clever things with stone. There are still segments of the ancient ruins in various sections of Peru and Ecuador which puzzle moderns because they cannot tell where or how joinings are made. The designs and dyes too, are a great mystery to them."

"I should think they would try to find it out themselves," Jim ventured.

"They are, but the secret hasn't been discovered as yet. This fastness of Amy-Ran was not reached by the whites for many years. Long before Pizzaro came with his brothers and friends this was a favorite spot of the rulers of the land, and as it was inaccessible to anyone who did not know the way, it was selected as the first retreat."

"Amy-Ran!" Jim exclaimed, "that is where Carlos took Buddy and me, and where —why, you know, Yncicea, where you and Corso came and got us out of a mighty tight jam with Arthur Gordon."

"Yes, that is the name," Yncicea replied.

"My dear," Donna Haurea interposed gently, "We are lingering inhospitably here when I am sure that our guest must be longing for his luncheon. At the table you can talk with him."

"That is very true," the Don smiled.

"My goodness," Jim assured them positively, "I had forgotten that I had a stomach."

"Which is a great compliment, but your

stomach will not forget that it belongs to you and would clamor for attention very soon. Yncicea will show you where you can brush up, then he will bring you back to us," Don Haurea smiled.

"That is well." Yncicea put down the two children who eyed him wistfully, but made no protest at his going, and he led the way to another section of the wall at the further end of the court yard. He pressed it forward and then Jim found himself in the house, or the Emerald Temple itself.

"Was this built out of the rocks?" he asked softly.

"Yes." Just then two servants appeared, the younger boy spoke to them in their own tongue, they bowed gravely and withdrew very quietly. "Come along," Yncicea urged. When the Flying Buddies had been in New York they had visited three comparatively new, very magnificent moving picture theatres, and now Jim thought of them by way of comparison, but he dismissed it as not very good.

"This is real stuff and all three of them could be set inside this and be lost," he told

himself as his eyes made a swift survey of the high dome, the great winding balconies hung with rich tapestries and tall, slender columns which were made of the most beautiful onyx and marble inlaid with gold, silver, and brightly colored placques of mosaic. On the floor were beautiful tiger and leopard skins, besides the fur of animals he was sure that he had never seen anywhere. Yncicea was hurrying him down a wide stairway, carved from the natural rock, with a bannister that glistened as if it were set with emeralds and topaz, but it was merely the coloring of the polished boulders. They went through halls like enormous rooms, and at last entered a bath cut out of the solid rock. At one end was everything in the way of modern conveniences, including tubs and basins. The greater section of the floor was given over to a pool, twenty feet deep at the further end.

"Here we are."

"Well," Jim glanced about and grinned. "I don't know if I can manage to spruce up here, but I'll take a crack at it. I'm not used to such close quarters."

"Would you like something bigger?" Yncicea demanded, then, before Jim could protest, the boy pressed a lever, the floor near where they were standing, sunk quickly, and the further wall slid back twenty-five feet. Immediately the water rushed in making the pool twice its length.

"I say, don't press anything more! What is this, the Panama Canal?"

"Sure you have enough?"

"Absolutely, positively, and of course!"

"That is well," Yncicea grinned mischievously.

"Tell me, old man, are we under the Amy-Ran—that place where those old ruins are piled, where the Indian woman lives?"

"That is the very edge of one of our properties. Now we are one hundred miles from it. Those ruins were not Amy-Ran at all, ever, but the Spaniards heard the Indians tell of a mighty place, and when those ruins were discovered, they thought they had found it, and my people took great care that they never discover their error," he explained.

"Jinks that was a good thing. I say, you

have a mighty good-looking mother, she is dandy," Jim exclaimed.

"Thank you. My people were not very dark and many of them were very fair, like my mother. They were never what is termed a barbarous race, cannibals, and when they conquered the provinces around them, they set to work to win the friendship of their new subjects and taught them gradually to live better. They were willing that the people who were added to our country should keep their own beliefs, provided they obeyed our laws, which prohibited uncleanliness of any sort. As the Yncas saw to it that all of their subjects had plenty of good food to eat, it was not necessary for them to eat each other."

"Pity the people, I mean the whites who came, were not so tolerant," Jim remarked.

"There are many stories taught of the barbarous races, but they were far north, above Quito, and along the Straits. They did not belong to the Ynca kingdom. I am telling you this so that you will be sure to have it clear."

"Thanks, old man. South America is so

big it could have almost anything in it. Well, Jinks, let's hurry and not keep your mother waiting. It's about five miles back to the court, isn't it?" Jim teased.

V

THE PROPOSAL

When the two boys were ready, Yncicea started to join his father and mother, but they went in the opposite direction from which they had come, through gorgeous halls, wonderful draped rooms, in one of which Jim saw a number of species of statuary and splendid paintings of fine looking men and women who have lived since the sixteenth century.

"My family wood lot," Yncicea announced with a grin.

"Great stuff, but you mean your family tree. They are too good looking to be dubbed wood-lots, or bone heads," Austin remarked.

"They tried in every way they could think to preserve the records of the people and everything that has been accomplished,"

Yncicea volunteered more seriously. His dark eyes lingered with pride on the faces which seemed to look down expectantly from their pedestals and frames, as if they would urge him to carry-on to the best of his ability toward the goal they had set. Jim noticed that the majority of the portraits were hung in pairs, a man and a woman, evidently man and wife, and many of these wore bands about their heads with the silk tassel, such as Yncicea had worn that day in the island on Lake Champlain, and Donna Haurea was wearing now.

"Did any of them become Christianized?" he asked, then rather wished that he hadn't.

"The band divided into groups for various purposes. Some studied the Bible independently and their opinion was that the Great Master's teachings were stressed in loving one another, which was good. Others were appointed to attend the Christian schools. Divisions were sent to all parts of the world to learn what was being done in every land, then, at a prescribed time they met those who remained to work and study here. There was a great conference, an exchang-

ing of ideas and information and after that the plan was formulated, laws made. Then, others went out to different sections of the world again, some of them to make their homes where they thought it could be accomplished. Many generations later my great-great grandfather made his home in Texas for it was decided that in the United States development would come most quickly. Here we are." He pushed open a last stone way and they were in a huge, but very delightful dining room. The table was set and the hosts were waiting. Several servants stood quietly in their places until Donna Haurea signified their readiness, then chairs were placed and the party took their seats.

"Oh, where are the twins?" Jim asked. He liked little fellows and thought it a shame if they could not be present.

"They have had their meal and are asleep," Donna Haurea smiled. "Such little ones need much rest to make healthy bodies." The meal started and Austin discovered that his hostess had been right; he was almost famished, but he hadn't realized what an appetite he had been growing. They

chatted on general subjects and the boy listened eagerly. Often they drew him on to talk and listened to him so attentively that he forgot to feel self conscious. In fact, it was almost like talking with Dad and Bob's mother at home.

"You have some sort of daylight here, Don Haurea," he remarked, suddenly realizing that was something he wished to know about.

"Yes, how do you like it?"

"It's great, but how do you do it?"

"That is something we will take up in the laboratory later." Then the boy remembered that in the Don's home in Texas there was a signaling arrangement of lights which glowed their messages as they changed color. One evening when he and his Sky Buddy had dined there the soft yellow glow turned to pink and green. The Don had explained later that they meant that strangers were within the zone, and that the travelers were obsessed by fear and anger. It had proven to be a couple who tried to claim a portion of the Haurea heritage, but the effort had been futile. The party as they approached were

quarreling among themselves and they were very fearful as to the outcome of their expedition, which was not at all satisfactory as far as they were concerned.

"With this daylight, how can you operate the colored-light signals?" he demanded. "Don't suppose you need them here though; no one could come driving along to make trouble?"

"They might and we have signals. Perhaps you can find them." It was a great game and Austin began to look about. He observed that while there were no shadows in the daylight, here and there were soft patches, or beams, as if an especially strong sun had cast its rays among the delicate leaves of a tree. These were a faint yellow tinge, and he grinned with delight. As he watched, they changed to red and scarlet, then back to the yellow.

"Does that mean something hateful or furious is coming?" he asked anxiously, but the Don shook his head.

"It merely means that we gave you a demonstration."

"Oh, I'm glad of that. Gee, I wish the

'Lark' had those signals when the dwarf and the snake came joy-riding with us," he said.

"They did. When the dwarf was in the back of the car the light on the dial burned scarlet, but you were studying and Bob didn't seem to think anything about it so he didn't look for trouble until it hit him in the nose," Don Haurea explained.

"Wow. Well, I must have been as big a goop because I didn't see any danger warning when the snake was getting ready to eat Bob."

"It burned for you then, but you were busy looking for places to photograph. You barely glanced at the board until you looked to learn the reading of the indicators, then you hopped out of the cock-pit."

"All we could do, after that, was let you fight and watch to help you when we could. We didn't want to kill the snake because if you had come back and told such a story people would have thought little of it, and many would have said that the Peruvian heat had gone to your heads. We wanted the snake to come back with you, so when he

coiled around the brace and you were both safe, we nailed him there so he couldn't crush anything, and you brought him in. My uncle was anxious that Don de Castro should appreciate the danger he is in from the Alonzo brothers," Yncicea went on with the story.

"Well, gee, I thought we were mighty lucky to get back with whole skins, and we were boobs. Bob and I were talking that morning about the central control of the 'Lark', but neither one of us thought to expect help from you."

"That is not surprising because you are not accustomed to such assistance. One thing we learned that the operation of the lights must be more striking to be really effective, and pilots must be trained to look for the glow as regularly as they do at the altimeter. In the case of the dwarf, he was hidden in the barn and climbed into the plane when you were all asleep. The glow was on when you took your places, but the morning was misty and your dial light subdued it somewhat. One of our pilots would have noticed it instantly. Had we treated

the dwarf with the electricity you wouldn't have known it and when you fought with him you too would have been caught and dragged down. That system must be perfected so that it will not run from one body to another. Had we more time to teach you, of course you would have stood still and waited for us to act. Nevertheless it is a good thing for you to fight your own way and you might have brought the dwarf in and had him imprisoned."

"I suppose he was killed," Jim ventured.

"He hit the sea hard, but he is small, and he was fortunate enough to land within sight of some fishing boats. They took him aboard and he had to stay there until they got a full load, then he was taken to Kingston. He was glad of that for he was afraid of the man Breslow—"

"Is that his name?"

"Yes. Horace Breslow. He is a ne'er do well cousin of the Alonzos and was one of many who were set to watch the ports for the arrival of the 'Lark'. The man who found it and put it out of business was to receive a great reward, but Breslow does not know

how well off he is."

"Without the reward?"

"Exactly. He intended that the Dwarf was to make you return to an isolated island, then the two were to leave you stranded, and take the 'Lark.' We would have brought it on and they could not help themselves."

"Wow. He doesn't know how lucky he is. What do you do with prisoners like that, kill them?"

"We are not in the killing business but we do not object to giving such people all the rope they want, as we say in Texas, and let them do their own executing, as those men did today at the bridge—"

"Our two-ringed circus—but I say, do you mind telling me if Arthur Gordon got down that rock?" asked Jim.

"Yes, he did. He had two half-breed Indians there to help him, but he's an insignificant sort of person and he'll bring about his own destruction later. He can't help it."

"Well, pickled pearls, I am sort of glad to know he didn't get smashed up. It's a long dive without a parachute," Jim announced.

"He had a parachute hidden among the rocks. He learned the value of carrying one the night he got away from the old ranch."

"We have more news for you," Yncicea put in eagerly. "The elder Gordon and Burnam broke jail and haven't been caught yet."

"Wow. Burnam's that fellow that was so keen to get you up in Vermont," Jim exclaimed. "When did they get out?"

"About a week ago. When we finish lunch, we'll go to the laboratory here and see what they have been doing," the youngster promised.

"I'm ready to go any time you are," Jim decared—then, suddenly he remembered that Yncicea had said that Don Haurea wanted to say something to him. "You wanted to talk to me, sir?"

"Yes, I do. You are proving yourself very co-operative and I should like to carry out several experiments with you—"

"That suits me—"

"But it is dangerous, my dear," Donna Haurea interposed anxiously, as if she wished that her husband would not make his proposal.

"Don't you worry, Donna Haurea, I'll be fine," Jim urged. He hoped that she wasn't going to spoil things for he was sure that whatever adventures the Don had in mind would be exciting ones. "Do you want Buddy too?"

"You make an excellent team," the Don smiled, then went on, "And I like Bob as he is, not too well versed in the sciences which you are studying. His interest is naturally along other lines and as things develop you may not always be together."

"I see," Jim nodded.

"When my son gave you those emerald rings we suspected that in some way it would become known that you had been friendly with him, and because of that, he might let drop bits of information which would fit into the puzzle and scheme our enemies are putting together, and they would endeavor to get you. For the present, I should like you to go on as you have been. Of course I cannot foretell what will happen in the future, but if you are in danger in any part of the world, and the rings are seen by any one of us, you will be assisted with-

out question. Another thing, as a novice, we should like you to use the various improvements we are developing. That will assist us to develop them to a higher state of efficiency. A third request is that you improve your laboratory, and later have patented in your name some little things which the world should have now."

"It's a tall order, but I'll do my best, Don Haurea," Jim agreed.

"Thank you. I thought you would. The patents will make their owner very rich as time goes on."

"But—they won't be mine really," Austin objected firmly, then added quickly. "Your people, I mean those of such a long time ago, couldn't have hidden enough wealth to last forever."

"That is quite true, my boy, but there have been keen men of finance who have belonged to our race from time to time, so the riches are not depleted. Added to which, these rushing torrents back here in the Andes still carry great quantities of gold, and we have been mining it and jewels for generations," the Don told him.

"I'm glad of that, but just the same, I'd feel mighty sneaky to take a lot of money for something I didn't do," the boy insisted. "Why don't you patent them yourself?"

"Because being the owner of them would make it necessary for me to spend more time than I care to give to such matters, and besides that, the things we are considering offering this generation are not the work of just one man. Many of them were developed before we were born. As to the money, you and I can make a gentlemen's agreement for you to pay a stipulated sum to the general fund. Those are details which can be taken up later. Does it make you feel any better?"

"Sure, that's a good idea. I'm much obliged to you, Don Haurea," Jim said soberly.

"We shall be glad to have you. As I told you once before, we have at various times taken outsiders in with us, but at our last conference it was agreed that the world is ready and needs something from us. We try, as often as we can to give the old world —or rather the people in it, some of the

wonders we have discovered in our researching. Now, I can see Yncicea squirming. He is anxious to have you to himself and I fear that we have infringed upon his holiday."

"Which he hammered asunder," Jim laughed.

"Knocked off," Yncicea corrected. "That is right."

"What have you been doing?" Donna Haurea inquired anxiously.

"Better let them go, my dear, and I'll explain at length," Don Haurea chuckled, so they excused the boys, and Yncicea led his guest into a smaller room where he pressed a bit of fancy carving in the stone, and a small door opened, revealing an elevator very like the one in the Haurea home in Texas, but this was more elaborate and it carried them down for what Jim thought must be miles, then the door was opened by a servant who was waiting. The boys changed their regular clothes for all-over white suits, similar to the ones Jim had already used frequently in the other laboratory. As soon as they were ready, they were escorted through a second small room, then

they stepped on a green oblong in the floor, and it carried them along swiftly until they came to a section where Jim saw tall narrow rows of drawers, like those in a cabinet. There seemed to be no end to the number of them.

"The filing department where the photographic records, history, televisions and pictures are stored. Later, I will show you how I study history, if you care to see it," Yncicea offered.

"I'll be tickled pink to see it," Jim declared.

"Yellow is a more pleasant shade if one is to be tickled. Come, we get off here."

The moving block stopped, and the two stepped in a room that might have contained a whole stadium. It was divided into numerous small sections and mezzanines, also divided into open cells. Each had a stone desk, seat, with a high cabinet in front, and at most of them a man or woman was seated. Jim knew that they were watching events which were taking place at that moment in various places all over the world. Yncicea

went quickly to one of them that was large enough for four observers.

"What have they done?" the boy asked the attendant.

"They separated as soon as they got across the river, sir. Burnam hastened to Chicago, and Gordon went on to his own ranch. At Chicago Burnam learned that there were some papers in an old root cellar at the ranch and they were supposed to contain some information. He got a plane and hastened to the ranch, coming down near Crofton, and proceeding on horseback. The elder Gordon discovered the root cellar had been blown up, and while he was investigating the hole, he came upon the armored room where he found bits of paper strewn around. He began to search. That is as far as I have observed, sir."

"Thank you, I'll look now, and Jim here. Adjust the lens so that we can both see, please."

"Yes, sir." The man set to work and Jim wondered.

"I say, don't you all talk a different language here?" he asked.

"Everyone is taught as many languages as he or she can master well, and the observers are versed in the tongue of the place he is watching," Yncicea replied. "Come, sit in, and we'll see." Austin took the place beside him and on the narrow bit of screen before him he had no trouble recognizing Cap Rock in the neighborhood of the Gordon ranch. In a moment he saw the elder Gordon, well wrapped in furs, busily searching about the ruins of the ancient section. He was hammering about the walls, and finally he worked a piece of the metal loose, plunged his hand into the hole and brought out some torn sheets of paper. Hastily he searched through them, but every one was blank, so he dropped them impatiently, and searched again. Once he found a piece with a few marks on it, but he couldn't make them out, and he just stuffed them into his pocket, when a second man stepped up close to him.

"So, you thought you could put one over on us, did you! Well, the chief got wise. Now, hand me that paper and hand it to me quick." There was no mistaking the voice and figure of Burnam even though he had

spent several months in jail, and was thin and pale.

"It isn't anything—"

"No?" Burnam snappd. "Well give it to me—"

"I'll be damned if I do! What right have you to come here on my property and tell me to give you anything?" Gordon demanded hotly.

"Come across, now, old man—"

"I won't." Gordon made a lunge at Burnam, his fist shot out and caught the big fellow in the chin, but the blow wasn't a very powerful one, although it did make Burnam stagger. He regained his balance, his own fist shot out and Gordon went with full force against the wall.

"Now will you?"

"No, I won't. I'm not putting anything over on anyone, and I won't be bullied by you. I don't believe the chief told you anything. You're the biggest liar in the country—"

"Am I? Take that, and that." Burnam hit again and Gordon went down, but he was game. He managed to wriggle out of his

great coat then sprang to his feet and rushed at his opponent furiously. They closed and hammered at each other until finally they were both rolling on the ground. Gordon managed to get his legs around Burnam and swung himself on top, then Burnam squirmed, his hand went inside his coat, it whipped out quickly, pressed a gun in the rancher's face, and pulled the trigger. There was a roar and flash. Gordon's hands fell weakly, he struggled to his feet, reeled, then sunk to the ground.

"Curse you—" then he was still. Burnam picked himself up, keeping the gun trained on the other man for fear he might be alive, but after a moment, he turned him over with his toe. He stuffed the gun into his pocket, then searched Gordon's pockets. He found an old wallet with a number of bills, which he appropriated, then scrutinized papers. Finally he found a crumpled one. It was like the paper scattered about the place, so he smoothed it out and examined it carefully. In order to see it better, he got out a flash, then he swore furiously. The screen

showed the boys what he saw, and Jim gave a grunt as he read.

"I am five years old," in a large childish scrawl.

"What is it?" he asked softly.

"A child's old copybook," Yncicea answered.

"And he—Burnam killed a man to get it. Gosh."

"He killed him because he thought it was something important."

"Oh." By that time Burnam was making a search of the place, but a few minutes later he left the dugout, went to his horse, mounted and rode away.

"Can't we see something to take the taste out of our mouths?" Jim asked softly. The thing seemed so horrible.

VI

THE ALAMO

"Let us pay a visit to the K-A," Yncicea suggested.

"Good. We'll see what is doing there," Jim agreed heartily. Being a witness to a cold blooded murder, in which one man killed his associate without an instant's hesitation in order to get possession of a scrap of copy-book paper gave him a feeling of nausea.

"I have another proposition. I promised that I would show you how I study history of the past three hundred years. Permit me to show you such an event now then we will peak away," proposed Yncicea.
peak away," proposed Yncicceа.

"Peak away—oh, I see, top off. That suits me just fine," Jim grinned at the boy's further efforts with the slang language.

"What would you like? I do not promise that I can give it to you, but we will if we have it." Austin thought of several stirring events of history, and suddenly he had an idea.

"Got the Alamo?" he asked.

"Its fall! I'm not surprised that so good a Texan would desire to know that, and I like it myself, for the State my family adopted has a large place in my heart. We shall see America's Thermopylae, the fall of the famous Alamo." He spoke to the attendant, who went to give the instructions. A moment later he returned and the three waited. Jim thrilled at the prospect of getting a comprehensive picture of the great event.

"It is set," the man announced quietly, and the two boys sat eager as any pair of young fellows who were watching a movie drama of fiction. Several seconds passed during which they saw nothing but yards of blurred film and Jim began to wonder if his eyes were not keen enough to make out what was happening.

"That is the outside cover kept over

record films," Yncicea explained. "Now it begins." Jim caught his breath and leaned forward on the bench.

The first thing he noticed was a rather thinly populated section of the State as if the photography had been done from an elevation and the camera held with the lens pointing straight down. Gradually he discerned the wide area which seemed to cover several miles of flat, sandy country. There was a good-sized river which did not move with much speed, and nestled close to one of its banks was the sprawly little town of San Antonio Bexar with very fragile looking barracks. Quite a number of people, Americans, Mexicans and Indians, moved about in the ordinary course of their business, or rested under the shade of the few trees. There was a trading post, men galloped up or down the roads on horseback, or drove teams, which presented a sorry looking lot.

"Perhaps you remember that a band of men determined to carry a war into Mexico had appropriated every good horse and supplies, which they took off with them. The act was foolhardy in the extreme and naturally

ended disastrously," the attendant explained.

"Thanks. I did learn that Sam Houston's greatest difficulty was keeping the country united. The men in all parts banded in small groups and started off more than half shot. They were urged on by others who were not really Texans, but had owned property in Mexico, which had been confiscated by the government, and they wanted to get back with all the force and arms they could and start a row. That was mighty bad business for Texas and it's a wonder she pulled out of it at all. Somebody sent Houston a six-pound canon but there wasn't even a round of shot for it, so they melted up everything they could and tried to get ready," Jim answered.

"You have the facts pretty accurately."

By that time the picture was showing the opposite side of the river and here Jim saw the great cottonwood trees from which the place got its name, after the monks of the mission had planted them. There was the canal dug to bring water to man and beast. The entrance to the Alamo was small, its

thick walls as Austin knew, enclosed about sixteen acres of land. There was the chapel, the long buildings which were divided into cells where the priests had lived nearly a hundred years before. A rude wooded protection had been erected hastily, and in a few places the crumpled wall had been reenforced with piles of stone and brush. Altogether it looked as if half a dozen ambitious boys could have overcome it in a few hours, yet for seven days, one hundred and fifty men (some with their families) had been besieged there by a force of over five thousand trained soldiers.

Then the two sides of the river were revealed. It was night and there was much gaiety. There was no thought of danger, the officer in charge of the barracks, Lieut. Richardson, and all but a few men on guard were attending a party given by a resident of the town. It was a colorful affair, fiddles played, children giggled, couples danced, others were chatting happily, and the hosts of the evening were busy seeing that every guest was served refreshments. Then, a horseman dashed up to the door, whispered a quick

word and if he had shouted it from the housetop it could not have spread its terror more quickly. Laughs were checked in horrified sobs.

"Santa Anna is coming! He is only a few miles away with an army. He has destroyed everything that opposed him and is taking no prisoners." What chance had they against such a force!

"Get everything you can together and retreat to the Alamo. We'll hold it until help can reach us from the east."

The scene was changed from one of feasting and good fun to one of wildest confusion. Household effects, artillery, ammunition and food were flung together and the little band of defenders took possession of the old mission. The young commanding officer caught up his wife and baby, and galloped with them to the frail shelter. As quickly as he could he got the able-bodied men together into some sort of working organization. The women were quartered in the tiny cells and did their part in the tragic events which followed. An appeal for help was sent out, but there was little help to be had for the most

capable men of the land were then assembled far to the eastward. A band of twenty, which included the beloved David Crockett and James Bowie (brother of John Bowie who designed the Bowie knife) responded.

Santa Anna ordered an unconditional surrender, which was not accepted, then the siege began. Every day saw the little force more and more depleted, but their guns rang out. Bowie was taken ill and was unable to hold his gun, so one of the women held it for him while he fired from his cot. Crockett snipped off the enemy as fast as he saw one, then played his violin or sang songs to keep up the company's courage. At last Sunday morning broke; Easter, bright and beautiful. The enemy surrounded the helpless stronghold, swarmed the walls from all sides, dropped over and fought hand to hand. Bowie was bayoneted on his cot. The women tried to hide in the tiny chapel but were quickly routed out.

Mrs. Richardson, her baby in her arms, knelt by her husband's dead body, and suddenly some one caught her. It was a Mexican officer. He rushed her quickly to a sheltered

corner, shot two soldiers who attempted to interfere, swung her onto a horse, which he cracked with his whip and she was dashed furiously away; they were the only people to escape alive. Those who were taken prisoners were instantly shot, and finally, the bodies were burned on a great bier.

"Whew," Jim exclaimed.

"Let us look at the end. It will make you feel better," said Yncicea.

"All right," Jim nodded. "Richardson was a great lad. If he hadn't held that place, Santa Anna would have gone on and on. It gave the others time to get together a bit, and it made them stop their quibbling."

"It is so. See. This is months later."

Jim turned his eyes back to the screen and now he saw another part of Texas. It was near a deep stream. Sheltered by a strip of forest, was the Army of Texas; seven hundred men, completely hidden from the enemy, which was thousands strong and only a short distance away. It was the middle of the afternoon, their guns were stacked, guards patroled indifferently, a few soldiers played games but the majority, with

their officers, were enjoying their siesta. A wide swamp stretched in back of them and so confident were they of their safety that they had not taken the precaution to send out scouts.

Soft orders were whispered in the forest, men crept forward swiftly, then horses charged while the Texas army band, a small boy with a flute, played "My Lady's Bower."

"Forward, men of Texas!"

"Remember the Alamo!" It was repeated over and over, a battle cry that struck terror to the half-asleep Mexican soldiers and officers. Many of them ran away, making no attempt to resist. Santa Anna came out of his tent in his underclothes, then fled without issuing an order. A few tried to rally the men, but it was useless. Whole lines of them dropped on their knees and pleaded.

"Me no Alamo."

It was all over in two hours. The great Mexican general was taken prisoner. Banners waved. The whole country sang impromptu melodies of rejoicing, and the fleeing natives who had been terrorized for so

long, returned to their homes. Texas was free. The Alamo was avenged.

"It was a hot scrap while it lasted," Jim exclaimed, then added. "That's a great way to get your history. When you want some special detail, you can have it run over again, and gee, you don't need to do any home work."

"But the events are not all so stirring as those, although there are many such. Sometimes watching past pictured events is excessively dull and I'd rather read a brief account of it in a book," answered Yncicea.

"Can't you skip?"

"Some things the instructor gives an oral talk on so I get a connected understanding of what has happened in the world. Now, we shall have the trip to the K-A and pay a surprise visit to Mrs. Austin. When you are returned home you can tell her what she was doing. She will be most mystified, but you must reveal nothing—"

"I won't say anything about it, then I won't have to make up an explanation," Jim replied. They shifted along the bench, and soon they were again seeing the neighbor-

hood of Cap Rock, and now it was snowing hard. The scene went swiftly about the K-A buildings and presently into the living room, where a bright fire crackled on the wide hearth, but Mrs. Austin was not there, nor was she in any of the other rooms.

"Know where she is likely to be at this time of day? It will save searching for her."

"She likes to walk. Has snowshoes and she might have started before it began to storm," replied Jim, but he was a little worried. He thought it hardly possible that his step-mother could have ventured up with the ranch plane for she hadn't much experience, and the weather looked as if the air along the Cap offered dangerous flying.

"We'll search about," Yncicea announced so for several minutes beams were sent like searchlights which extended further and further from the ranch until at last they were penetrating into the forest. By that time young Austin was so anxious that he could hardly sit still. Finally the beam crossed a ravine and an ice-bound creek, then they discerned something moving.

"A timber wolf," Jim said hoarsely. The

beast seemed to be interested in something in the vicinity, for it trotted up and down, occasionally sniffing the air, and twice it gave a low howl. Then, as the beam went further they discovered what held the wild thing's attention. Something alive was struggling and for an instant they thought it was a calf that was lost and terrified, then the young Texan's face went white.

"It's Bob's mother," he choked and half jumped from his seat. The attendant laid a hand firmly on his shoulder.

"Steady!"

"All right." Austin pressed his lips with determination and gripped the edge of the bench so hard that his knuckles were white as the snow in that forest in Texas.

"She fell and has injured her foot," Yncicea spoke softly.

"S-she'll die out there in the cold!" Jim couldn't contain himself any longer.

"Just a minute, Jim old Scout, do not divest yourself of your B.V.D.'s—"

"Keep your shirt on," the attendant translated. His fingers were moving swiftly over the board, as if he were playing a piano,

then he pressed a button and a soft bell rang almost instantly.

"We are in touch with the Laboratory of the Box-Z. Zargo is standing by," Yniccea announced, and Jim stared at the isolated scene. He could see Mrs. Austin lying still as if exhausted from the effort to drag herself home. And the grey timber wolf moved cautiously forward.

"H-how can we help her, Yncicea? My Dad's crazy about her, so are we all, and—gee, if Buddy knew—"

"He doesn't know, Jim Scout, and we will help her if it is possible," the young fellow promised earnestly.

"Thanks, I am sure you will." Jim kept his eyes on the figure and saw that the snow was falling in silent heavy flakes that were quickly covering her great fur coat. Then he noticed that she got small in the film, or whatever it was, and circles went out in swift ripples like those made on a smooth pond when a stone is dropped into the water. In quick groups they were added and as they extended over more and more territory, Mrs. Austin became a speck in the centre. The

boy knew that they encompassed miles from the spot where she had fallen, then, suddenly, on the far edge something tiny swayed past the rim and a moment later it was the focus of a second beam.

"That is Pigeon Jute," the attendant said softly and Jim recognized the Indian who was striding through the lonely forest, his great web snowshoes leaving a double trail behind him. It was the Indian who had been shot by young Gordon when he tried to prevent the outlaw from stealing the Austin's new plane. Don Haurea had taken him home for medical attention, and since then Jute had become a part of the Haurea household.

"He has been hunting," Yncicea added.

"Is he looking for Mom?"

"No," the boy replied frankly. They watched the Indian proceed without pause, then suddenly he came to the edge of a ravine, where he slackened his pace and glanced about to get his bearings.

"If he goes the other side he'll miss her," Jim choked, and again he gripped the edge of the bench.

"He will not go," Yncicea said softly. "Crack from such—"

"All right, Old Man, I'll try to snap out of it," Jim made a brave effort to obey, but his mind was in a tumult of agony and he was sure that no other experience he had gone through had been so nerve-racking. He saw the Indian move forward, hesitate, start again, then he struck swiftly onto the right side of the ravine, even though it took him three miles out of his way.

"He will find her, Jim Scout," Yncicea declared and in his voice was a note of triumph. Austin couldn't say a word, but he watched the Indian passing over the ripple of ether waves until at last he stopped short, saw the wolf in the distance, glanced about and spied Mrs. Austin. He gave a sharp shout, and the beast loped off into the forest, while the man moved quickly to the woman's side. He bent over carefully, touched her cheek, then, without preliminaries, he caught her under her arms, swung her onto his back, and started slowly through the silent forest toward the ranch house of the K-A.

"She'll b-be all right." Jim gave a little giggle, like a girl, then laughed harshly, hardly knowing what he was doing.

"Have a drink of water." The attendant pressed a glass to his lips and the boy swallowed every drop.

"Now look," Yncicea invited. Jim did and although the scene was still in the forest, he saw two men hurry up a hill, and in a moment they reached the side of the Indian. They carried some sort of blanket, put Mrs. Austin on it, then they carried it as if it were a stretcher.

"It's Zargo," Jim cried joyously. The three men made excellent progress as their snowshoes carried them at good speed toward the ranch house, and presently it was in sight. Austin saw his step-mother taken into the house, the "foreman" of the Box-Z carried her to the living room where the fire was burning brightly, and one of the servants stood by to help.

"Is she much hurt?" Jim demanded.

"A bad sprain. She will be quite recovered in a few weeks."

"That's good; I shouldn't want to watch anything like that again—"

"But if we had not picked it up it might have been some time before anyone went out to look for her," Yncicea reminded him.

"That's right, great guns—I don't know how to thank—"

"Don't try—"

"I say, you will keep an eye on her, I mean—"

"We'll observe her every day and let you know how fast she gets well," the attendant promised.

"That will be great—I say, I expect I'd better go back to the De Castro's. They'll think I fell off the cliff."

"It isn't late," Yncicea declared.

"I'm wondering about Dad. If Buddy is all right, he could start home tomorrow, but —I guess I had better not say anything about Mom."

"Let us discuss the matter with my father," Yncicea proposed.

"Fine," Jim agreed. They hurried out of the great laboratory and Austin felt as if he had lived several lifetimes since he had en-

tered it that afternoon. He paid no attention to the magnificence of the great halls of the Emerald Temple, but finally they reached a department where the rooms were small and cozy. Don Haurea and his wife were there, and Yncicea called to his father.

"Do you know what we saw?"

"Yes, my son." He turned kindly to Jim. "I am sorry, my boy, it was an anxious hour for you."

"I'm wondering about Dad and Bob."

"Suppose you let me invite your father to accompany me home tomorrow. I shall leave in the afternoon and get to Texas much more quickly than the 'Lark' can make the trip. As I understand it, your Flying Buddy needs a bit more rest. This warm climate will strengthen him quickly, then you can return home together," he proposed.

"That suits me if it does Dad. I'll leave any explaining to you, Don Haurea," the boy said eagerly.

"Yes. I'll take care of it," he promised, and Jim was relieved.

"Now, sit down quietly and we will have some music," Donna Haurea urged, and

there was no resisting the invitation. Austin was given a comfortable chair, then a cabinet was opened. He could see a knob and an indicator, and in a moment, from right over his head, it seemed, came the strains of soft music. He listened keenly interested and as the harmony rose and fell his distressed mind was soothed amazingly. Finally it drew to a close.

"That's some radio," he gasped. "I never heard such a performance. "What station is it?"

"The Andes own," the Donna smiled.

"The Andes own—the—I say, do you mean that it isn't a station at all?"

"It isn't a station at all, but the harmony of the mountains. Want to hear more?" she asked.

"Yes, please—then—after, may I see what sort of thing you have rigged up to catch it—jinks—"

"Surely, after," the Don promised.

VII

THE BROTHERS ALONZO

"Well, my son, I am very glad to have this opportunity to return to Texas with Don Haurea and leave Bob here where I am sure that he will recuperate quickly. There is nothing like warmth and sunshine for mending strained nerves." Jim and has father were in the Haurea limousine, which had called at the De Castro's to pick up the man and his luggage. The young fellow was going along to meet the plane and he was looking forward with interest to seeing the sort of machine his friend used in his long distance travels.

"It's great," the boy agreed heartily. "We'll come flying home in a week or so. The doctor says that is all Buddy will need."

"I am relieved and I would wait for you,

but I feel restless, somehow. Anxious to get home. Guess I am getting old. You will both be very cautious. Peter is going to arrange so that you leave the country without anyone excepting the family knowing when you start. However, I do not anticipate any trouble with the Alonzos as far as you are concerned. As a matter of fact, I think that you will be safer coming by yourself for those men have no quarrel with you. It is particularly fortunate that Don Haurea happened to come here. I did not know that he had interests in Peru."

"He's a great chap, isn't he, Dad?"

"He certainly is a keen-minded man. I never fully appreciated how very intelligent and clear-headed he is. It is odd that as neighbors I knew so little of him; yet we meet thousands of miles from the spot where we have both lived for generations—the families I mean—and find that we have many mutual interests."

"Is he putting money in the new project?" Jim asked.

"Yes, indeed. The three of us; Peter, the Don and myself had a very profitable meet-

ing and my neighbor showed us in several ways where we could manage the business far more successfully than we thought, and his capital makes it possible for us to do things on a larger scale. Also, he recommended several exceptionally clever workmen who can take hold immediately. We seem to be stopping."

"I see the plane in that field," Jim nodded toward an open spot where a good-sized machine, her engines running, was resting as if she had just lighted on the smooth surface. With a quick, expert eye, the boy took in every line of her. To all outward appearances she resembled the new models, but he knew perfectly well that she carried equipment very different from the ordinary flying machines.

"So it is, so it is, and Don Haurea is already in the—cabin I suppose that would be called. Somehow it looks larger than a cockpit," Mr. Austin remarked. The car drew close and stopped and the tall Texan got out while Jim gathered up his bags.

"You are very punctual," Don Haurea smiled. "This machine of mine is one that

was built especially for me by some highly efficient designers, so we shall be home much more quickly than you anticipate. I'll tell you a little about its operation as we fly, Mr. Austin. How are you, Jim?"

"Fine, thank you, sir. How's—everybody?"

"*Everybody's* fine, thank you." He knew that Jim was asking about Bob's mother, and the boy grinned with relief at the answer.

"Hope you have a good trip." It took only a moment to place the luggage, and presently Mr. Austin was occupying a huge passenger seat which was as comfortable as any at home. There was a partition toward the front for the pilot, who was ready to take off.

"Contact?" the man asked merely to find out if the passengers were ready.

"All set," the Don answered. "Good bye, Jim."

"Good bye, good bye, Dad." The boy ducked out of the way and the plane moved forward quickly, rose almost immediately and spiraled in sharp turns until she was

several hundred feet in the air, then she banked, climbed straight and in a moment she was so high Jim could hardly see her in the sky. He gave a little sigh of loneliness at his father's going, then pulling himself together, he got into the waiting limousine and was driven quickly back to the De Castro home, where he found Bob propped up in a hammock in the portico, a half dozen books and magazines and three very small pups beside him.

"Did they get off, Old Scout?" he demanded.

"Sure thing," Jim replied. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, sit down and tell me how everything is at the K-A."

"The K-A?"

"Sure, and the Cross-B," Bob persisted.

"What are you driving at, what's on your mind besides hair, Old Timer?" Jim realized that Bob suspected that everything was not as it should be at home, but he determined not to tell his step-brother that his mother had been hurt unless he couldn't possibly

get out of it. Caldwell looked at him earnestly.

"Don't mind telling you. First we get Dad down here by the skins of our teeth and discover that the Brothers Alonzo have been piloting a dirty deal and we crack their ship from under them, very nearly. Your Dad finds that it will be necessary for him to ooze around and steer the boat for a while, a few days, anyway. You and I take a snake on his maiden air-trip and I get washed out. You-all assure me that Dad can't possibly leave for home for a couple of weeks at least and I'm to sleep off that morning after feeling. Then, all of a sudden your father picks up and goes home, and you-all say that everything is hunky, but change of plan comes after you spend a day with Yncicea and the family," Bob answered elaborately as his fingers gently rubbed a pup's chin. Jim drew a chair up and took the other two pups, hoping they would help him out.

"Yours received and contents noted, dear sir," he laughed. "The first part of your communication—right up to the statements that you had orders to 'sleep it off' are absolute-

ly and positively accurate. The rest of it is also. I thought that Dad told you that Don Haurea had asked permission to come in on the new deal. He's putting up a bunch of money, has made some corking suggestions, including several capable men whom Dad met and is tickled pink to get for executives and heads of departments. A special meeting was called, the members of the board—or a majority of them, accepted everything. The Don wanted to go home, he invited Dad to go along with him, and that's that. Except, you've known the Old Man only half as long as I have, but it's time enough for you to have discovered what a homing body he is. He's never gone away yet that he hasn't cut business or pleasure as short as he could to get back to the K-A. Trusting that this is entirely satisfactory, I remain very truly yours."

"Oh, you do. You're not kidding me along, Buddy?"

"Cackling pups, why should I?" demanded Jim.

"Well, all right. Now, tell me what you saw at the K-A. You needn't tell me that

when you and Yncicea were observing the Gordon's and the scrap between the old guy and Burnam that you did not go on up the Cap. Is the place burned down, the herd doing a razzle-dazzle, or someone trying to claim the property? What's the worst?" Bob persisted. "I'm dead sure you had a look-in, and you didn't tell me. Why?"

"I did have a look-in, but heck, I'd seen so many things that were hair-raising, I didn't think of it. The ranch is just as we left it, Old Timer, and don't you go retarding progress by a lot of needless worrying," Austin replied.

"What was Mom doing?"

"Sitting on a chair in the living-room by the hearth. She'd been for a walk on the web-feet," answered Jim. Bob studied him carefully, then gave a sigh of relief.

"Thanks, old man," he acknowledged, then went on, "You know they got a plane to use about the works and a pilot to fly her?"

"Sure?"

"Well, Mr. De Castro caught the flying fever from Dad, I guess, so he's got a plane for himself. It arrived while you were away

and they have started to build a hangar for it. The pair of them have been slipping in a few lessons on the side, and now they want us, as soon as I can, and you whenever you are ready, to sit-in with them until they learn more of the fancy touches. There's a lot of fog hangs over these mountains they say. Sometimes you can't see them at all, and the De Castros are anxious to be able to land on any spot they set out to reach."

"Gee, that's great. We'll have to do our duty by them." Just then the antics of the pups demanded the boys' attention and they laughed heartily.

Jim was especially joyous because Bob had accepted the bare statement of facts regarding his mother, and while Austin hated like fury to tell him anything in a way that was misleading, he knew how much it would worry the younger boy if he were told the whole truth. A few days of undisturbed rest, mental and physical, would restore the lost strength, while the story of Mrs. Austin's suffering and danger might set him back for weeks. She had been found in plenty of time, was safely at home, well cared for, and

would be the very last person in the world to want any of her men folks worried more than was necessary.

The boy knew, also, that in some way, Don Haurea would prepare his father, before they reached home, so the man would not be too distressed. He had no idea how that would be accomplished, but he suspected that the Haurea plane kept up radio communications with the Box-Z, that Zargo would inform him of Mrs. Austin's improvement and he could pass on the information, without any of its agonizing details. His Dad would be doubly glad that he had hastened home and all would be well.

"I say, on the way back, let's drop down on Belize and visit the barracks. I liked that chap Seaman a lot, and it would be jolly to have a look at the place," Bob proposed.

"All right. They seemed like a decent bunch. Queer we should get to know Seaman; an old pal of Allen Ruhel who is a Royal Mounty in Canada. We surely had a great time up that side of the border," said Jim.

"True, me lad—looks as if this fellow

wants you." A man servant was approaching with solemn dignity.

"Senor Alonzo wishes to speak with Mr. Austin."

"My father?"

"He asked for you, sir."

"On the telephone?" The Flying Buddies exchanged puzzled glances.

"He is in the drawing room, sir."

"Bring him here," Bob spoke up, and when the servant had gone, he turned to his step-brother. "That old bitter-sweet hasn't come for any good purpose. We'll face the firing squad together."

"Suits me," Jim acquiesced, but it didn't really, for if the Senor Alonzo was about to make himself offensive, the young fellow would have preferred to "face the firing squad" alone and not take a chance on letting Bob in for anything more that was disagreeable. Presently the portieres were opened again.

"The Senors Alonzo," the man announced.

"Trouble always comes in pairs," Bob whispered as he saw the two men. Jim rose to his feet to greet the callers, but he kept

one of the pups in his hands. The two men paused an instant, the younger one took a furtive glance about him, while the other advanced along the path.

"It is a great pleasure," Silvester Alonzo bowed very low.

"It is indeed," Jim also bowed very low in a fairly good imitation of the elaborate manners. "This is my step-brother, Robert Caldwell."

"It is a great pleasure," Silvester bowed again, but Bob took advantage of his invalidism and merely nodded languidly. "You are ill?"

"Just beginning to recover," said Bob faintly.

"Greatly I regret your indisposition."

"Do be seated, gentlemen," Jim invited. The servant had brought extra chairs, and the two callers sat down. They certainly looked like a couple of capable business men, and although the younger one was not quite so much at his ease as his brother, neither of them appeared like men who would be guilty of dishonorable actions.

"The warm climate of Peru will assist

your recovery, or is it an attack of our excessive heat which has caused your illness?" Silvester inquired.

"It was an attack of some kind," answered Bob, but he made no attempt to go into further details.

"I expect it is my father you want to see, Senor Alonzo," Jim ventured. He wanted to get rid of the fellows as quickly as possible.

"The servant told me that he is not in." Silvester Alonzo made the announcement as if he thought it was the servant's little joke.

"He isn't," Jim answered emphatically.

"That is to be regretted," Silvester told him, but neither of the men made a move to go, and the boy wondered what was coming next.

"Senor De Castro is at the works, I believe, if you want to talk with him," Jim ventured cautiously.

"We have just come from the works," Vaca snapped.

"Then probably you saw him," suggested Austin. His fingers played with the puppy's soft ears.

"We left two hours ago," Silvester cor-

rected, and glanced at his brother as he might at a refractory child.

"I don't approve of wasting time with a couple of boys," Vaca announced in emphatic tones.

"The fact is, young gentlemen, it is important that we have a talk with your father. The servant could give me no information regarding him. Do you expect him in before dinner time?"

"Before dinner." Jim glanced at his watch, then back at the caller. "No, I am positive that he will not return before dinner, Senor."

"Too bad."

"Is there any message we can take for him?"

"Yes. I shall tell you a little of the matter, and if he cares to do so he can take it up with me. At the works this morning we found several new men, one in charge of the promotion department which my brother has been handling—"

"Which your brother has been handling?" Jim repeated innocently.

"I will say, which he expected to handle."

"And which I intend to handle if we have anything to do with the place at all," Vaca added sharply.

"Yes, senor," Jim said respectfully.

"Now, another matter is, this morning we found several radical departures being put into operation. We wish to impress upon your father, who is virtually the head of the organization that it is very important that we return to our original plan of development," Silvester announced with a cold smile.

"Yes, sir," repeated Jim with added respect.

"Also, we find that men have been taken on—some of them we do not know at all, and one of them is especially objectionable to us. He has been in various organizations from time to time but in none of them has he made a striking success for either himself or the business he was supposed to manage."

"Oh," remarked young Austin and he hoped that he would learn the name of the particularly objectionable individual.

"We have considerable money invested in

this business and we do not propose to have it ruined and lose our profits by mismanagement," Vaca informed them.

"Exactly," said Silvester. "You might inform your father that we shall be glad to take the matter up with him, as the head of the organization. We insist that these men and radical measures be dropped at once. It was very humiliating to my brother to go there today at noon, and find that a stranger had superseded him."

"Well, er, who could have made such a change?" Bob inquired.

"Mr. Austin must have knowledge of it," Silvester answered cautiously, then hastened to add, "But he is a stranger, comparatively speaking, in Cuzco, and we are confident that he has been ill advised."

"Yes, sir," said Jim.

"And he will be grateful to listen to men who are highly informed in the matter."

"Of course."

"If he isn't willing to make the changes we want, we are going to withdraw our names and our money from the firm. We are not going to be made the laughing stock of

the business world," Vaca declared heatedly. "You can inform your father of that fact." He stood up quickly, and Bob raised himself on his elbow, as if it were a great effort.

"Your father will be shot to pieces over that, Jim. Can't you get in touch with him, somehow?" he urged, and the two men looked at them with sudden approval. Jim glanced again at his watch and sighed deeply.

"Gee Buddy, I wish I could," he answered feelingly.

"Well, where is he?" Bob persisted.

"I can't tell you, Old Man, for I do not know." He turned to the callers, who were both on their feet. "Did you look for him at the works? It's a pretty big place."

"We were informed that he has not been there today."

"Did you ask Mr. De Castro?" Bob wanted to know.

"We did not. When we discovered what was taking place we came at once to find Senor Austin. If you will deliver our message we shall be greatly obliged."

"We shall be very happy to," Jim replied, but he did not add that the message would be delivered to Pedro De Castro instead of his father.

"Thank you." They bowed elaborately, and the servant showed them out of the house. When they were gone the two boys looked at each other. Caldwell sat up, quite as if there wasn't much of anything the matter with him, and grinned broadly.

"Don't forget to tell your old man that he's going to lose those shining lights. Won't he cover himself with crepe!"

"Won't he!" repeated Jim. "I don't believe they were doing anything more than bluffing. If they do withdraw there will be a celebration in the firm, but Dad said he has learned on good authority that they are heavily involved in various ways and really can't afford to get out from under a thing that is sure to bring them some money, even if their interest isn't as great as they tried to make out."

"Mr. De Castro said they used to be very fine men, highly respected, but during the past few months some one lit up a lot of

dark holes in their methods, and what the light revealed is kind of rotten. Jim, when we get back to Texas, we'll put our noses to the ranches, and keep out of business. It's a great war," said Bob.

"And these guys are not licked," added Jim gravely.

VIII

CARRIER PIGEONS

"I say, Jim, I've seen some blamed good looking pigeons around here," Bob remarked to his step-brother a few days later. They were both on the balcony where the younger boy had been spending a good deal of his time recuperating rapidly, and getting as brown as an Indian.

"What kind?" Jim inquired, although he wasn't particularly interested.

"They look to me like carriers, homing pigeons," Bob replied.

"Is that so!" Jim answered, and then he thought of something. "Know if the De Castro's have any on the plantation?"

"I asked Carlos and he said they have a good many pigeons, but no homers. He liked them when he was a little fellow so his father had a dovecote built for him. After

while he got tired of bothering with them and had to go off to school, so they were left to the man who has charge of the poultry," answered Bob.

"Humph. I say, Buddy, probably there's nothing in it, but you remember that Jute said he'd been raising long-distance carriers for Arthur Gordon. You used to have a flock of Jute's birds. Are the ones you saw anything like those?" Jim asked.

"I got the glasses and have been watching for them since the first one I saw," Caldwell admitted. "Didn't think anything about it at first, just did it for amusement, then I happened to think of Jute's flock on the Cross-Bar when I was a kid. Mom used to let him raise them there and he gave me quite a few. The Indian was hepped then on breeding extra quality flyers."

"Yes. Your old cote is still on the Cross-Bar. Are the ones you've been observing anything like those Jute raised?"

"It's been so long since I examined them that I've kind of forgotten the markings. When I went off to school with you, I gave mine back to the Indian, and I don't believe

I've done more than glance at them since that," Bob answered ruefully. "Seeing them down here got me thinking, and when we found out that Gordon junior was in the vicinity, I began to wonder if our prize villain has any connection with them."

"Wouldn't do any harm to take a squint into the matter and see what we can find out. Know where Carlos' flock is kept?"

"Somewhere near the chicken houses I expect, for he said the poultry man had taken them in charge. Let's go out and rubber around."

"Feel able to?"

"Sure thing. I feel strong as a bronc," Bob declared.

"Then, let's go. Guess the De Castros won't mind." The boys made their way downstairs and asked a servant where they could find the poultry yards.

"This way, Senors." The man started with them willingly, and ten minutes later he left them in sight of a group of chicken houses, built inside a huge wire enclosure. Leisurely they strolled about and discovered that the plant was not a particularly modern one.

"Guess most of the birds they raise are hatched by the old-fashioned method, with the natural mothers," Bob remarked as they noted several hens clucking industriously to a fluffy brown brood. At the further side there were a number of ducks, geese, and turkeys, but not a large flock of any specie.

"Looks as if they don't make a business of it. Just have enough for home consumption," added Jim. At last they discovered a gate, which they opened and then strolled inside. Immediately the chickens came fluttering to them, with expectant clucks.

"They think we are going to feed them," Jim grinned. "You mustn't eat between meals," he told the chickens.

"There's the cote," said Bob under his breath as he spotted the little house built high on the side of the larger building. It looked as if whoever took care of it had not neglected it, for the place was clean, as far as they could see, and properly screened. The upper section extended higher than the other building which had a flat roof.

"Wonder how they get up there," Jim remarked.

"Probably from inside. Let's see." They proceeded slowly, as if merely casually interested, but when they were inside, someone came hurrying after them.

"Senors, senors," was all they could understand, but the tone was one of angry remonstrance.

"Great place, this. Fine chickens," Bob announced reassuringly, then added to Jim, "Up there."

Without waiting for further parley they started to climb a ladder toward the high roof and in a moment were standing by the opening. The protesting attendant had disappeared, but while the boys were examining the place and the pigeons, which were certainly carriers of a high breed, the man returned accompanied by a young fellow, who glanced up at them, then shouted in English.

"Come down, Senors. You must come down!"

"Oh, hello, we just got up here," Jim told him pleasantly.

"Dandy bunch of birds you have. Are they yours?" Bob added.

"You will disturb the hens, Senors," the chap answered irritably.

"Oh, no we won't," Bob smiled at him. "We have flocks of chickens at home, and besides there are none around here." The poultry man jabbered furiously at the younger one, who jabbered back equally furious.

"He says no one is allowed to trespass in here, it is against the rules," the interpreter announced. "You must come down at once!"

"Whose rules?" Jim inquired. He sat down on the rung of the ladder prepared to listen to reason, while Bob proceeded with his investigation, which took him onto the roof.

"Why, Senor Carlos De Castro's," the chap told him. "You must come down." The poultry man took hold of the ladder and began to shake it so vigorously that he would have hauled it from under the boy in another moment, but Jim came down in two jumps. He caught the fellow by the collar and gave him a good shake and an enterprising slap on the side of the face.

"Senor—" A dirty fist shot out, but Jim's arm was the longer, so he doubled his own

fist and sent the fellow skidding across the chicken house. He brought up several feet away, and his face was black with rage. Austin caught hold of the interpreter.

"Look here, we're guests of Senor De Castro. You tell that quacking bantam that if he doesn't haul in his horns I'll sprinkle cracker crumbs in his bed. We aren't hurting the chickens, nor the pigeons either, for that matter, because we both had some when we were kids. Ask him what in the name of flying eels he means by trying to haul the ladder from under us, and if he won't tell you, he can tell Senor De Castro."

The orders were snapped out in sharp sentences. Immediately the interpreter started to translate to the fellow who had picked himself up, and was also preparing to grab an ax that leaned against the wall near his hand. He answered with a volley of chatter, and the two plunged into an argument which lasted several minutes, and finally ended in the poultry man's relinquishing the weapon, and shrugging his shoulders as a sign that he was feeling less aggressive.

"He says that his orders are to keep everybody out of here, especially away from the pigeons. Most of them are prize birds which belong to Senor Carlos, and from time to time many of them have been stolen. He did not know that you are guests of the big house and he apologizes humbly because of his not understanding. He is very anxious that you shall not report him to Senor De Castro, as he has a wife and family to support and it would be a serious matter to him if he should be dismissed from his position."

"We'll think it over," Jim replied noncommittally.

"He would be in great difficulties," the interpreter urged.

"Next time he'd better think of that before he starts anything," answered Jim with an unforgiving scowl.

"Armistice signed?" Bob called from the roof.

"Under consideration," Austin told him.

"I'll sit in," the younger boy laughed as he came down the ladder. "Didn't notice that hostilities had started until it was too late

to join forces with you. Good looking flock of birds they have up there. Did you say they belong to Senor Carlos?" He had turned to the poultry man, and the interpreter answered for him.

"Yes, they do, Senor. He started to raise them when he was a boy and his father built this cote where they could be well cared for."

"They look as if they get plenty of attention. Come on, Buddy, let's ooze along," Caldwell suggested. The poultry man spoke eagerly to the interpreter.

"We have some peacocks. Maybe you would like to see them," he suggested politely.

"Sure, trot them out," Bob replied. They were lead out of the yard and on to a large, special pen where a dozen lovely birds trailed their radiant plumage as if they realized they were being admired. After that they were escorted with elaborate courtesy about various sections, and it wasn't until they saw Carlos driving along the road that they managed to tear themselves away.

"I say, I forgot to ask if Yncicea let you know whether Dad got home all right?" Bob

remarked when they were finally strolling back to the house.

"Sure. They landed yesterday and gave your mother a grand surprise."

"Bet she was tickled. Hope she doesn't get too inquisitive about why you and I stayed behind," Bob grinned, then went on, "Those birds may or may not be the variety Jute raised in Texas, but they are banded, there are a lot of young ones, and I picked up an empty container that had been dropped. They are used for carrying messages you can bet your gold filling."

"I had a hunch you were finding out something. Are they like the ones you have noticed flying over?" Jim asked.

"They are. Now, let's go ask Carlos about them. He told me that he doesn't bother with them, and that his orders were strict regarding them. Another thing, next one I see, we'll follow in the 'Lark.' A pigeon doesn't do much higher than sixty miles an hour, if we can once locate it on the wing, we'll find out where it lands." Caldwell was all excited now for he was convinced that there was something suspicious about the poultry-

man's reception of them and he did not believe that the man was not aware of the family guests.

"Most people are tickled pink to show off their birds. Did you notice about what time it was when you spotted those flyers?"

"Saw some in the morning, and others in the afternoon. They seemed to be going both ways." By that time the boys had reached the house and Carlos came to greet them.

"It is good to see you about, Bob," he said cordially.

"Thanks. I got interested in the pigeons and went out to look at yours. I used to have some pretty good ones, and Jim had a few too."

"I am glad you found something to amuse you, but I fear that my pigeons are a sorry looking lot. I turned them over to the chicken man and haven't looked at them since," Carlos laughed. "Did have a lot of fun with them when I was a little shaver." Neither of the boys mentioned what had happened when they went to visit the birds, but it certainly did not look as if the young man was overly particular about his one

time pets. "I just dropped in for a minute to say hello. Dad sent me to do an errand. Lots of people who visit this section find the plantation interesting, so don't hesitate to go wherever your fancy prompts. The servants will be glad to show you about."

"Thanks. I do feel like rubbering, and this place is different from anything I've ever visited," Bob told him.

"Take good care of yourselves. So long, until dinner time. You haven't had any more visits from the Alonzos, have you?"

"Nary a visit. Did they withdraw their valuable names from the list?"

"No such luck, but pretty soon my father intends to ask them to resign. They have been butting around the works and interfering; or rather they are having some rough necks do it. I'll trot." He hurried away, and the boys stood quietly looking after him.

"We're welcome to go wherever we like," Bob said softy. "Me Buddy, me proboscis is warning me there is something decaying in the immejet neighborhood. Let's get the 'Lark' and have a squint about the country. Maybe we can find another dove cote."

"I'll go, Buddy, you hang around here," Jim urged.

"I should say not. I've been grounded long enough and now all I need is a good crack at the sky. I'll let you do the piloting, me hearty, but I'm coming along. It's me own idea and I'm following it up, I am."

"But, old man—"

"I'm an only child and badly spoiled. Didn't I give in and stay cooped on the verandas and in the portico for days while you have been waggling the De Castro's new wings over my head? This is a rebellion and you can't put it down. Come on, I'm getting my step-ins." He started off, so Jim followed, and the older boy thought that after the poultry man's malicious exhibition, it would be just as well to have his Flying Buddy safely in the air.

"I'll go on one condition. We're not landing anywhere, and if we see anything that looks at all suspicious, we're not going to do anything more thrilling than turn our tail and nose home, and that right pronto."

"You'll be doing the flying, old man. Gosh, I feel like a young colt. It'll be great to go

a-climbing. Promise you'll give me one grand loop," Caldwell chatted, and Jim guessed that he was really more anxious to get up into the sky than look for dove cotes.

"A loop you shall have," he promised sympathetically.

"How does the De Castro crate behave? Pretty good?"

"Pretty good. When we leave it will come in handy to cart stuff back and forth. They don't need a two seater, and can use the rear cock-pit for freight."

"How do Carlos and his father like flying? I thought when they took off this morning they were making hard work of it," Bob remarked.

"That was Carlos. I think his father is easier on the controls. Well, come along."

Presently the Fying Buddies were in the cock-pit and the "Lark" was climbing grandly into the sky. Bob's face was wreathed in wide smiles and every breath he drew was deep with content. Jim almost forgot the mission they had set out on, but after giving his grounded pal a joyous half hour, the matter of the pigeons returned to his mind

and he headed back toward Cuzco. Then they began a systematic search as they zig-zagged back and forth from one end to the other. Caldwell was dutifully sweeping the country beneath with the glasses, and at last, when they were flying over a very beautiful estate, he pressed Austin's arm.

"I'v seen a lot of birds, but they are the ordinary ones, and a few cotes that look like the ones kids build for themselves."

"That all?"

"There's one down on this place. I saw a couple of birds go in or I shouldn't have noticed it. It must be built inside that tall garage, and has an entrance under the eaves," Bob explained.

"We'll note what the place looks like and where it's located, then get home. We can tell Carlos and his father, and also tell him about their poultry man this morning," Jim remarked.

"Sure. I think your Dad would want us to let them know anything that seemed suspicious," Bob agreed, then gave his undivided attention to an examination of the home below them and the neighborhood

around it. "I say," he said as they were making the return. "Are there any volcanos among the Andes?"

"There are a couple of real lively lads up nearer Ecuador, but I don't believe there are any in this section," replied Jim. They both glanced at the distant peaks, and a bit later they were gliding down to the De Castro landing.

"When we go to the camp tomorrow, want to go along?" Jim asked.

"Sure Mike," Bob answered promptly.

"All right."

That evening after dinner the two boys and their hosts assembled in Carlos' own room and when the Texans were sure that they would not be overheard, they told the De Castros about their experience when they went to look at the pigeons, and also of their find later in the afternoon. The South Americans listened with interest, and Carlos frowned.

"I haven't given any orders about those pigeons," he declared in astonishment. "Did you, father?"

"Of course not, my son. I knew the cote

was there and the birds have multiplied in the normal course of events," he answered, then he turned to his guests most apologetically. "I regret very much that any servant on the plantation should have so far forgotten himself. I shall have the man dismissed immediately."

"I wouldn't do that," Jim spoke up quickly. "I don't believe he's the chap you are after. Do you recognize that estate from our description; where we saw the other dovecote?"

"It's the Alonzos," Carlos told them without hesitation.

"The vallains still pursue us," muttered Bob.

"From whom does your poultry man take his orders?" Jim asked.

"The house steward. When my dear wife died I tried house-keepers, but with little success, then I got a man, one who had been well trained and we like the arrangement much better," Mr. De Castro replied.

"Had this one a long time?"

"Less than six months. The other was taken suddenly ill and had to leave. Come

to think of it, Silvester Alonzo recommended him to me very highly and he brought a few under servants with him," was the answer.

"Silvester has been a right helpful little boy, regular household hints," volunteered Bob.

"That's the gang you want to fire," Jim said quickly. "The Alonzos never put them here for any good purpose. Is the poultry man his, too?"

"No, he's been on the place since his boyhood." The man's face wore a deep frown and he paced the room nervously. "To have a dozen servants on the place who are probably in league with the men we are opposing is a very bad thing. No telling what steps they will take."

"You want to go easy, Dad, don't have a grand discharging spree. Find fault with the steward, or something like that," Carlos suggested.

"I shall proceed cautiously. Do some careful questioning, and get rid of all of them within the next few days. I have a friend who is removing to the United States; he has some very good servants, and I am sure

I can replace these with proper help," he decided.

The next morning Mr. De Castro paid a visit to his friend and made the arrangement to take his entire staff at once, then he returned home, and that evening, the household was served by a very capable new butler. The former steward and everyone he had brought to the place had been sent away, bag and baggage. The poultry man had confessed, when he found that he could do so without injury from his boss, that the steward had, from time to time replaced the pigeons with a fine breed of carriers, and his own orders were to see that the messages they brought were put into the hands of the steward immediately. Every day, birds, sometimes several, were sent out, but he did not know their destination, and of course he could not tell what message they carried. Mr. De Castro ordered the coop covered so that no bird could leave, and that if one came, the message was to be brought to him.

"I should say that we are deeply grateful to Senor Bob for his keen observation. We owe you both much gratitude," the host told

the boys. "I shall acquaint your father of your service to us."

"We've had some funny experiences so we got the habit of watching out," Jim answered. "I say, I promised Buddy he could come with us in the morning—we didn't fly today."

"If he is quite strong!"

"Stronger than Samson was in his prime," Bob declared eagerly.

"That gives me much pleasure, but, I do hope that you will not hasten away from Peru immediately."

"Tell you what. Stay a week anyway, then you can take word back to your father how things are coming along. He thought a fortnight ought to see the works going fine under the new plan," Carlos suggested.

"Let's do that, Buddy. We'll get home in good time," Jim urged.

"Suits me, and we can have some more views of the ocean," Bob grinned.

IX

FOG

The next morning, bright and early, Pedro De Castro was at the controls of his new plane with Jim beside him, while the happy Bob was in the rear cock-pit with Carlos. The man took-off beautifully, climbed well, leveled off on the course and attended gravely to the business of piloting. Austin knew that he greatly enjoyed this efficient method of traveling and passed on every bit of helpful information that he could think of. There had been little bad weather, one or two light rains, and only a few days when the air was not clear. They reached the works in good time, and prepared to spend the greater part of the day there. The Flying Buddies had no trouble finding amusement, for it was Bob's first visit, and Jim showed him

around. Later they strolled into a forest of great trees and climbed enormous boulders in search of oddities of nature. Every trace of Caldwell's weakness had vanished. In fact he seemed sturdier than ever.

"I say, old fried fish-hooks, it isn't going to be so clear going home," he remarked, when they were making their way back to the works.

"It's clouded up a lot," Jim admitted. "I'll persuade Mr. De Castro to pilot. He may get some experience in blind flying."

"I'll be glad when I get back into one of those front seats. I feel as if I am sitting on a bed of cactus in the back," said Bob.

"When we're going home you can catch up the piloting you lost, Buddy. You have been a blamed good sport. I'd have been biting nails by now. Come along, some one has rolled out the crate for us. Guess we are about ready to start."

They hurried into the new office building, but found Pedro De Castro in a discussion with one of his men. Carlos was overseeing the uncrating of a large shipment of freight, so the Flying Buddies sat down to watch

him, and thoroughly enjoyed the performance. Most of the workmen were very dark skinned, wore nothing more in the way of a costume than a pair of cut off trousers, a colored sash, and thick soled sandals. Groups of them sang odd rollicking airs, punctuated with an occasional cuss word if something did not go quite as it should.

"Glad you are here to see this," Carlos grinned at the guests.

"It's a good show."

A stack of cases had been opened, the men formed in several lines which led from the large receiving room to the smaller departments of the stock room. A package would be taken out of the case, passed with a swing to the first man, then on, until in a moment there were men bobbing, catching, tossing, turning with hands outstretched for another. Some of the more swift sent their packages in high throws so the next chap would have to leap to get it. A secretary entered the room and announced,

"Senor De Castro will be presently ready."

"Right-O," Carlos responded. He left one

of the men in charge and went to brush up, while the Buddies made their way to the plane.

"The 'Lark' has it all over this bird like a tent," Bob said softly.

Mechanically the pair examined her from one end to the other. No more being caught with snakes for them. There was plenty of gas, the engine roared smoothly, instruments were checked up, Bob scrutinized wires and struts to make sure no one was trying any funny business there, Jim took a keen survey of the insides, every bit he could see of them. This was a performance he went through every time the plane was left alone for any length of time. There wasn't so much as a new kitten stowed away. The Sky Buddies realized that this plane was not centrally controlled in case of emergency, as the "Lark" was; its wiring and woodwork were not covered with a chemically prepared substance which would resist acid, and there were no warning lights to flash over the dial board if danger was threatening. The fact that the servants of the De Castro household had probably been in the service

of Silvester Alonzo and might be seeking revenge for their sudden dismissal, made the boys extra cautious.

"She's right as a new top," Jim announced. He took his place, Bob stood on the ground beside him.

"It's going to be mighty thick flying," he remarked.

"Sure is," Jim acknowledged. Just then the De Castros came toward them, and Carlos promptly made for the rear seat.

"Dad's been wanting some fog-flying experience while you are here. Guess he's going to get it," he announced cheerfully as he took his place and Bob joined him.

"Suppose we roll out the canvas, Buddy," he suggested. "It may be extra cold up there, or turn into a nice juicy rain."

"Good idea," Jim agreed. They got out the rolls, adjusted them so they could be closed if necessary. Finally all was ready, and the plane moved off. After their own "Lark", which rose nearly as soon as she started, the long run this plane made seemed awkward to the boys, and they wished that their friends could purchase the better model.

"All is good." Mr. De Castro went through the preliminaries, and soon they were climbing into the fog which was rapidly settling like a thick blanket.

"I think it's going to rain," Jim told him.

"That is so, I am sure. I shall not do much speeding, but we are in no hurry," he answered. He seemed to look forward to the experience with a great deal of satisfaction, and Austin thought it was odd that young De Castro should be less enthusiastic than his father. He glanced at the course the man had set, compared the instruments, then sat alert and ready to help or advise if need be. The fog was more dense than any he had experienced since that day over the Caribbean Sea when he and the dwarf had come to grips. He fully appreciated that the experience would be most valuable to the pilot, but he couldn't help wishing that he was in the other seat.

"In this you would go pretty high?"

"Yes, I would," Jim answered. He glanced at the altimeter and although the course they usually followed was over rugged ground, he knew there were no great heights.

Suddenly the sky was rent by a flash of forked lightning. He felt his companion's body get more tense, but his hands moved steadily and his lips were set in a firm line. They climbed three thousand feet, then leveled off again, and the boy felt the wet mist dripping on his face.

"Want the cover?" he asked.

"I would rather see about me," Mr. De Castro answered, then a faint smile lighted his face. "Not than I can."

Then, above the roar of the engine they heard a distant grumble of thunder, which swelled into an angry crash before it died away, leaving an ominous silence that the noise of the plane did not dispel. Austin glanced back over his shoulder but he could barely make out the rear cock-pit, and straining his eyes ahead it seemed as if they were tearing through a black sponge which ripped open reluctantly as they screwed their way forward. The lights on the plane looked as if they were encompassed with a thick covering and Jim wished that he had thought to carry a supply of magnesium bombs so they could cut away the fog at

least long enough to make a landing.

The De Castro plantation was well east of Cuzco and about the buildings there were a number of spots into which they could come down safely. Besides that if they happened to descend in one of the fields they would not do enough damage to matter, but the place was dotted with olive and fruit tree orchards and out of this blanket they might drop right into one and smash. If the serving men about the place were accustomed to the plane's coming and going they would realize the necessity of starting a flare to help guide the pilot, but the new hangar was barely started and the lighting system designed for it was not even installed.

Anxiously Jim thought of Bob in the back and futilely he wished the young fellow had been content to remain at home one day longer. Driving through this muck would do him no good, especially since he fully appreciated the danger they were facing. He hoped the rear cock-pit was tightly covered, and he bit his lip at the thought that there was no communication tube between the two seats. Again he glanced back, but the dim

light which surrounded the forward seats seemed to accentuate the blackness behind them. He tried to comfort himself with the idea that the pair would have secured the canvas to keep themselves dry. The fact that he didn't see even a faint gleam gave him a little assurance that the boys must be safely under the protection and would not think a great deal about the fog-blind flight.

At that moment a sharp crash of thunder seemed to shake the whole universe. The plane quivered, dived, then nosed up and with a violent shudder, careened fearfully. Courageously De Castro fought with the controls to keep their balance. His face was ghastly white and Jim leaned forward, straining on his strap to watch every move. Swiftly the man glanced at him and the boy nodded, but for minutes it seemed as if the machine were suspended motionless, then she raced forward, and as she did so the lightning came again in blinding flashes, one right after the other, that ripped open the darkness revealing livid scenes in stark whiteness, and right ahead of them loomed a huge pile of rock. Swiftly Jim kicked the

rudder, pulled the nose upward, and they climbed again, holding their breaths, and expecting every instant to feel the powerful impact of a contact with something immovable, but it did not come. Flash after flash split the heavens in masses of tearing branches that lashed all about them, but although the boy tried to catch a glimpse of a familiar landmark, he could make out nothing in that blazing light which left them trembling as if they had the ague. On and on they went. Austin's eyes on the control board watched every move of the indicators, then glancing at the clock he began to calculate.

"Aren't we nearly home?" Mr. De Castro asked through the tube.

"We ought to be," Jim told him. Just then he happened to look down to the dripping wet floor and he noticed patches on the water. The only way to account for them was a leak in the gas, yet the meter showed little depletion in the supply. He calculated how much they should have used and it proved up, so that caused him no anxiety. They were nearly home and a loss by leakage

wouldn't be serious. Again came the boom of the thunder, and this time it echoed and re-echoed as if it never intended to be silenced. A moment later the engine gave a sputtering conk, and another followed.

"What makes it do that?" De Castro asked tensely.

"It comes when the gas is low," Jim told him, but according to the indicator the gas was not low. Whether it was or not, the engine stopped, the propeller whirled silently. Quickly Jim tried to start it again, but to no avail.

"Glide her down. Make it a long one, as long as you can and we may catch a glimpse of something." The man carried out the instructions carefully, and the plane tipped her nose slightly, but something seemed to buffet her about. She hit pockets that sent her up with a bang, and then something seemed to press her down hard and she dropped like a weight. The man at the controls kept his nerve and his wits about him during those perilous minutes, then suddenly, just ahead of them a blaze of light shot up, splitting the fog and darkness, and re-

vealing a smooth stretch a bit further on.

"Good work," Jim sighed with relief. "Your men have lighted something to make a flare. We're all right now."

"They shall be rewarded for this, well rewarded. They are good men," De Castro said earnestly. Both of them relaxed and the plane glided gracefully to the landing, it ran several rods over a slightly bumpy surface, then came to a stop.

"That's fine. How do you like blind flying?" Jim asked.

"I should not seek it out," the man answered heartily. "And I thank God that I was not alone during such an experience." The pair sat back and mopped their faces gratefully.

"Before I forget it, I want to remind you about magnesium bombs. They are a big help in such dirty weather, and I'll show you how to use them before we start north."

"That is most good of you."

"Another thing. I'd suggest that you have some sort of communication between the front and rear cock-pits. I'm surprised there isn't anything of the sort in this machine,

but I suppose it was forgotten, or perhaps the builders decided it could be installed if it were wanted."

"It is an excellent suggestion. I shall attend to it at once. She is a fine machine to keep up through such an experience, is she not?"

"She's a dandy," Jim declared. "And you did a great job of piloting. Congratulations." De Castro smiled ruefully.

"It is not generous to be glad one has one's friends close at hand during such danger, but I am very glad. Also, it would have been a little less anxious time could I have heard my son's voice from the back. When the hangar is built, it must have a good system of landing lights, and we will secure the services of a man who will be experienced in seeing they are used right in bad weather. They may assist other airmen who are in danger."

"I say, aft there, come out and play around the bonfire." That was Bob's cheery shout above the storm.

"Going to wait here until it slacks up a bit, Dad?" Carlos called.

"Wait here, why we are at home—" He looked around, then scowled in bewilderment. There wasn't a sign of the plantation house, nor anything else in the immediate neighborhood.

"Thunder and Mars," Jim muttered.

Just a little way from them was a tall dead tree, from the base to its topmost stump was a blaze, as if it had been saturated with gas or oil, and by its light the boy saw on three sides of them, steep towering rock walls, the tops of which were lost in the thick fog. A feeling of apprehension seized him, and he strained his ears to hear some familiar sound. Nothing came but the crackling of the burning tree, the moan of the forest wailing in the storm, and water dripping all about them.

"We are not at home," De Castro gasped in utter bewilderment.

"Do you recognize this place?" Austin asked.

"I do not," he whispered.

"Any idea where it is?"

"It must be miles out of our way," De Castro told him. There is nothing like this

near Cuzco nor in the vicinity of the plantation. That I am sure. I followed the course just as I have every day."

"I know you did." Jim glanced at the compass, then loosening his safety belt he leaned over, his fingers moved about the rim until suddenly they came into contact with something sharp. It was a piece of metal and he worked it out, his mind was in a turmoil.

"You have found something?" the man asked gravely.

"Yes. The needle was deflected. Only a highly experienced airman could do that. We must get out of here as quickly as we can, no one but a murderer would put a plane in such a fix," he snapped. "I'll take the pilot seat, if you don't mind."

"That is all right.' They started to make the change, then suddenly Jim remembered the motor and his throat tightened.

"I'll have to see what happened to the motor," he explained. He tried it experimentally, but nothing happened, then he lifted the covering over the machinery, and in a second he knew.

"Tell me," the man demanded.

"We haven't a drop of gas."

"No gas?"

"No. The tank was punctured to make it leak. We had a good supply when we started, enough to get home two or three times, but it's all gone," he choked.

"It did not indicate!"

"I expect someone fixed that needle too," the boy said wearily, then he pulled himself together. "There must be some way!" He glanced about at the deep forest and a feeling of horror assailed him as he saw its stark outlines.

"What's the—"

"Hush, Buddy," Jim warned. He recalled then that the plane had been out of its shed when he and Bob returned from their walk. Gee! They had gone over it from tail ensemble to prop, but they had not thought of those two things which might happen. He bit his lip and tried to reason what they had better do. It was pouring rain now and they were absolutely helpless as far as he could think.

'What is it?" Bob was beside him.

"Some one tampered with the compass

and made a slow leak in the tank. We're miles out of the way—"

"I say, Buddy, whoever did that, set this tree on fire to bring us down here. Perhaps we made it more quickly than they expected. Come on, shake a lot of legs and get out of that. This is a wild place, we may be able to hide," he suggested hopefully.

"Guess that is what we'd better do," Jim said softly.

Hastily the four of them got out of the plane, huddled together a few moments and glanced anxiously about. The Flying Buddies were sure that whoever had brought them down would lose no time in attacking them, unless they had concocted some other plan to get rid of them all. There seemed to be only one side through which they could pass the great rocks, and Jim hesitated. He did not want to run the risk of being backed up against those massive walls, nor did he want to walk into the bandit's trap, or whoever they were, coming to make attack.

"Let us go this way," Mr. De Castro decided. He selected the pass, which was thickly wooded. In the light of the burning tree

they could make out the trees and underbrush, and as Jim glanced at the fire he saw that it was burning less brightly now. The rain would squelch it in a short time. Whether that would help or hinder them was another matter.

"Coming Buddy?" He saw Bob stop.

"Sure. I'm getting the canvasses." A moment later he had ripped the two loose. They might afford them a bit of protection.

Stealthily they made their way over the rocks and finally they reached a stretch of low growth. The wet branches whipped against their flying suits, adding to their already drenched condition. Overhead the thunder bellowed again, and the echoes reverberated among the crags. Jim wondered where they were, but try as he would, his brain refused to bring up a single helpful suggestion. Dully he tried to picture what fate was in store for them, and as he stumbled along, half crouching, half walking, he began to piece the thing together. Someone had tampered with the controls of the plane; had calculated with fiendish accuracy and had fixed the leak and the compass so they

would be forced down in this isolated section of the Andes, almost surrounded by massive, impassable crags. There was no doubt that the same scheme included lighting the tree. That was a puzzle, but after a moment's struggle with it, Austin thought he reached a conclusion. The plane had been tampered with at the works, which probably meant that Silvester Alonzo and his brother were responsible. But why the burning tree? The only answer was the obvious one. The gang, if it was a gang, wanted them to make a safe landing. Where in heck were they? The dry tree could not have been set ablaze very long before their appearance. Gee, he thought miserably.

"Wish we'd been in the 'Lark,' Bob whispered. "The men at the Lab would have known what was happening and they could have kept us up."

"Yes," Jim admitted, but it didn't make him feel any better. While the men at the Lab kept the "Lark" under constant observation, that beloved little machine was safely in the shed at the plantation. At this time of day Yncicea would be busy with other

work and not searching for the Flying Buddies for he had talked with Jim on the telephone that morning. The boy sighed. By this time they reached a projecting section of the cliff, and had to go around it.

"You may as well stop!" The words were uttered insolently, and the four brought up abruptly. "We've been waiting for you."

X

GORDON AGAIN

"Yes, welcome to our little retreat. Boys, make them comfortable!" The words were snapped out but they need not have been uttered, for eight men poked their guns in the faces of the stranded flyers and caught them roughly.

"Reach for it, all of you, quick."

"Make it snappy. Hesitate and you're lost." There was nothing to do but obey, and four pairs of arms reached without argument. Austin searched the faces of the men but did not recognize any of them.

"Now tie 'em, tight." Ropes were whirled about them and they were secured to stumps. There were no trees large enough near the "retreat" so the prisoners were made to sit down while knots were tied.

"Oh Santie Claus, look at this." The fel-

low who was securing Jim spied the emerald on his finger and promptly removed it, while a second chap performed a like service for Bob.

"The boss said not to touch anything on them," another warned.

"G'wan. I ain't had any pay in months. This'll do me nicely. My girl likes green, en he-boys oughtenta wear rings," he retorted as he stuffed it into his pocket.

"Them was orders," the chap repeated.

"You're only jealous. Close your trap."

"One o' you lads go fix that leak en fill the tank. We don't want nothing undone when the big fellow gets here," the first speaker reminded them, so two of the group disappeared around the cliff.

"Sorry you didn't get here before supper," one remarked. "We had sow-belly en beans while we was waiting fer you. It was real tasty."

"Why have you men committed such a crime?" Mr. De Castro demanded. "It is one of the most heinous attacks I have ever heard of and you certainly can't expect to gain by it."

"It's the boss' order, old man," one answered indifferently.

"En you better not call his idea names. He don't take to such attitudes," added another.

"Heeneus ain't a nice word," put in a third.

Jim wondered how they all happened to speak English, then he looked them over and decided that they were not natives of Peru, but importations of a mixed nationality. He looked around, as far as his bonds would permit, and made out that they were in a sort of mouth under the cliff. There was a carefully built fire at one side where there was no danger of its being discovered by searching planes. The overhanging stones were a protection from wind and rain, for the spot was quite dry, he noticed. As soon as the captives were secure, two of the gang set to packing up a miscellaneous collection of rough camping equipment, and a little while later the boy heard the roar of the engine and realized that the leak had been mended, and the tank refilled. One thing seemed evident, they were going to take the

plane when they left the place.

After Mr. De Castro's outburst, none of the prisoners said another word. The men were evidently waiting for some one and were under orders to do nothing until he appeared. Half an hour passed and in that time the storm seemed to abate. The boy could see the fog slowly lifting as the brisk breeze drove through it, and finally the clouds overhead began to clear away, until that part of the world became fairly light. He was facing the cliffs so could not see any shadows, but he was sure that it was still too early for the sun to have set. It was probably obscured by the spur of the mountains.

The minutes dragged and each one was harder to bear. The flyer's bodies were cramped, tortured by the ropes which were wound around and around them, their arms were tight to their sides, and their feet poked out in front. Another hour went by, then Jim heard the distant sound of a plane hurrying in their direction. He knew perfectly well that it was no one to help them, but like the rest of the party, he was hoping against hope that by keeping alert they

would discover a loophole and make their escape. The plane circled above, spiraled down swiftly, and dropped behind the curve in the cliff. Presently some one came walking briskly, and in a moment he was in the centre of the group. He was tall and slender, his shoulders stooped, his flying suit covered him from head to foot, helmet and goggles concealed his head.

"Got 'em O. K."

"They were so tame they came right to us," one of the men laughed.

"Good of them." The newcomer looked them over, and the Flying Buddies' hearts sank. They were mighty positive there would be no escaping from this man, for it was Arthur Gordon.

"The wops there took a couple a rings," came the answer.

"You didn't touch anything, did you?"

"Damned if I do," the chap who had Jim's ring objected insolently.

"You blasted sneak—"

"Shut up. Hand them over," Gordon ordered.

"Suit yourself," Gordon replied indifferently.

"My dear sir, this is an outrage—" Mr. De Castro protested.

"I agree with you. Too bad you happened to be with these kids today, for I don't want you. But keep your mouth shut." With that remark, the Sky Buddies realized beyond a shadow of doubt that it was the American gang that had captured them. It was the organization that was so deeply interested in Don Haurea, his son, and the treasure they were seeking. Gordon came toward Jim, squatted down on his heels, hauling off his gloves, and shoving back his helmet.

"Well!" Jim said coolly.

"Pity you didn't go flying alone and keep your host out of this, but I'm not waiting forever," Gordon snapped.

"What have you been waiting for?" asked Jim.

"You know damn well."

"Sorry, but I don't. You'll have to enlighten me," drawled Jim. He felt as if his body were on fire, but he spoke quietly, and

met the stare of his old-time neighbor squarely and without flinching.

"I'll tell you then. In the first place, I owe you several comebacks for your blasted butting-in. You weren't satisfied with queering the works at the Box-Z but you had to come down on our ranch."

"Not because I wanted to," Jim told him emphatically.

"What did you come for then?" Gordon snapped.

"The sheriff asked us to find out if his deputy was all right. The kid was inexperienced, all alone on the ranch, and he asked me to drop down and have a talk with him," Jim explained.

"Good fish story."

"No it isn't, it's just the plain truth. Why didn't you stick under cover until we flew home? Then you could have gotten away," Jim argued.

"None of your blasted business."

"Suit yourself."

"Aw, say, get to business. I don't like hanging around here," one of the men interposed impatiently.

"Think I came for my health?" Arthur growled.

"If you did, it don't look like such a good place," was the retort, and Jim wondered why the men spoke so insolently to Gordon. He decided that probably the reason was that he had little if any authority over them. Perhaps this was merely a few who were doing a job on the side on their own hook.

"You said you'd get some information that would wrap us all in diamonds," another declared.

"Sure. Now, prove up!" the third snarled.

"Yes, that's the idea. Prove up, or by heck we'll do you in and send you on a platter to Chicago."

"Give me a chance, will you?"

"You got all the chance in the world." While they were arguing, Jim thought of what Don Haurea had said about giving such men enough rope and letting them hang themselves. Dissension among them meant fights, and only the man who could draw first, knife or gun might survive.

"All right then, shut up." Gordon turned back to Austin. "You've been hanging

around the Haurea's, and palling with that Indian brat and his uncle. Now, you tell me where they got that treasure hidden, and how to get into the place, see."

"No, I don't see!"

"If you don't, I'll shoot your three pals right now." Gordon's face was white with rage and he snarled the words out furiously.

"Sorry old fellow, but you're barking up the wrong tree. I don't know anything about their treasure, where they keep it, how to get there, nor what they have got," he replied firmly.

"You lie." Gordon struck him with his fist, and Jim's mouth bled.

"Hey, Gordon, what do you think you're doing? What is this fairy tale you got in your bonnet anyway?" Bob demanded.

"What do you know about the Haurea's and that kid?" Gordon turned to the younger boy.

"Not much," Bob answered.

"Well, let's hear it," one of the other men put in sharply.

"Don Haurea's place adjoins my mother's on one side and the K-A along the Cap.

The family has lived there for generations, I don't know how many, was never interested enough to ask. There were no boys in the family, so I hardly ever went there. Then Jim and I were off at school—"

"Hey, go on, we ain't here to listen to the story of your life. What do you know about this treasure, diamonds, pearls, emeralds, and car loads of gold that were hidden away somewhere in these mountains?"

"I don't know anything more than I happened to read in history. There was a paragraph that said some men claimed the Indians hid a lot of their treasure," Bob answered.

"Yah, go on," the chap leaned forward eagerly.

"Those Indian provinces went from Quito up in the north almost to the Straits. About three thousand miles. And it went through the country beyond Cuzco."

"We ain't interested in no geography," came an impatient interruption.

"You asked me what I know," Bob reminded him.

"Let me talk—" Gordon started angrily.

"Say, your tongue is loose in the middle and at both ends. You been talking—shootin' it off too much." Gordon was shoved back roughly.

"*We're* going to find out something about this stuff we're after," another informed him.

"It ain't so safe to trust you."

"Now, kid, quit your stallin'. Did you ever see this treasure?" the interrogator turned back to Caldwell.

"I did not," Bob answered.

"Ever hear anything about it?" was the next question.

"Only rumors, the same as you have, probably. I do know this much. For hundreds of years men and expeditions have gone over the ground where the Indians lived. Thousands of fellows have died in these mountains, trying to find it. They have blown every old temple and grave yard to slivers, and as far as I ever heard, nothing was found."

"Say, this guy's been stringing us," one of the men declared and he shook an angry fist at Arthur Gordon.

"I ain't so stuck on hanging around this neck of the woods," another added, as if he expected the ghosts of dead Indians to rise up and strike him down.

"Let's give him the works." Gordon was caught by the collar, but he howled and struggled to get free.

"If you'll let me handle the thing I'll get some information," he roared, but the prisoners could see that he was afraid of the gang he had organized to help him.

"Well, you snappin' short horn, go to it." He was flung away, and he scrambled to his feet hurriedly. One hand went quickly to his side, but a gun was poked into his face.

"You keep your hands out where they belong like a nice boy," he was ordered.

"That's the idea. Now get busy, or we'll leave you here so full of lead they'll think you're a mine when they find the skeleton." The threat was made so emphatically that there was no doubting it would be carried out. Gordon turned back to Jim, his eyes blazing and his fists clenched.

"Listen you—"

"I'm listening, and getting an earful," Jim told him.

"That Indian kid gave you two rings, valuable ones, didn't he?" How did he happen to do that?"

"I was with Buddy up in the northern part of Vermont visiting my aunt. The 'Indian kid' as you call him, and his uncle were working on the farm and living in a shack somewhere along the lake—Lake Champlain. They never came near the house, and when the lake flooded, Buddy and I took a lot of people who were stranded on the islands to the mainland. This pair was among them, and when they thanked us, the kid gave us the rings," Jim explained.

"Oh, he did?"

"Yes."

"Well, didn't he tell you to meet him here in Peru?" Gordon snapped.

"He did not," Austin answered.

"He didn't, but just the same, you're here and he's here. A couple of days ago the pair of them took you for a ride—"

"What's that?" interrupted one of the men.

"I mean they met at the Inn in Cuzco and drove back into the mountains. Now, where did you go?" Gordon volunteered.

"That's something I can't tell you—"

"You mean you won't."

"I don't mean anything of the kind. I've only been in the country a few weeks, less than a month. If I was familiar with it, I might be able to tell you where we went," Jim persisted.

"Didn't you come here to these Amy-Ran stones?" Jim looked at him in puzzled wonder.

"These Amy-Ran stones, Gordon, what do you mean?"

"It's plain enough what I mean. You were on top of that S plateau before you'd been here thirty-six hours," Gordon declared.

"I can tell you how they come to go there—or here—if that's where we are," Carlos spoke up.

"You can, well then do it," Gordon snarled.

"They expected to return to the United States soon and I wanted to show them something unusual and interesting, so I pro-

posed that we fly to the Amy-Ran stones on top of this spur. Isn't that so, Dad?"

"Yes, my son, that is true, and I am quite positive that neither of the boys had ever heard of the place until that day," he answered quickly. "I have listened to this questionnaire and may I add that there have always been rumors afloat of fabulous wealth hidden by the people of the Ynca rulers who governed this land before it was conquered by the Spaniards. From time to time very thorough and exhaustive searches have been made but they have resulted in nothing more than a large expenditure of money, great hardships, and numberless deaths. Not a trace has been found of secreted gold or jewels of any sort, and sane men of our time look upon the matter as purest fiction, or the illusions of the demented," he told them.

"What do you know of these rocks up here?" Gordon snapped at Carlos.

"Nothing, except that they are a great puzzle to people, and more interesting than most curiosities. When I was a boy, about ten, I came with some cousins, and friends of theirs. There were old ropes hanging over

the edge then, and we managed to climb up. We nearly broke our necks getting down, and not long after that several tourists were killed. The government forbade anyone going near them for they are considered too dangerous. I didn't come again until I thought it would be a good stunt to fly there," Carlos explained.

"Do you live in these parts?" one of the men asked the elder De Castro, who nodded painfully.

"I was born in Peru, in Lima, and have spent the greater part of my life in this section of the country," he replied. "If you have come looking for lost Ynca treasure, you are on a wild goose chase, I assure you, for hundreds of men who know the land, have been over every inch of it."

"Just the same, this S plateau has never been investigated," Gordon insisted. "And it's the place called Amy-Ran, a stronghold that could never be taken by the Spaniards."

"I do not know where you get your information, sir. I have never heard anything like it, and from my earliest boyhood I have been deeply interested in the intimate his-

tory of my country, and have studied it most carefully. I do not believe this spot was ever contested. It is particulary inaccessible and will probably remain a wild fastness to the end of time," Mr. De Castro told them.

"I say, this guy's brought us on a fool stunt." The gang exchanged threatening glances which boded ill for Gordon

"He ain't getting away with nothing like that—"

"I tell you I know what I'm talking about. There's a way to get inside this spur of the mountains, and I'll prove it if I have to blow the top off them," he roared defiantly.

"It ought to be a very interesting experiment," Mr. De Castro remarked, then went on, "but as a citizen I must warn you that our government would greatly resent such an act. The land is not yours. As far as I know you have no right here at all, and I am positive that if you should perpetrate such a deed you would get yourself into most serious difficulties. May I remind you also, that even if you should accomplish such a colossal undertaking, blow the top off the mountains, anything they might conceal

would be buried so deeply you couldn't dig it out in months, and you could not take an ounce away without paying for it."

"Aw," Arthur growled, and he turned wrathfully toward Jim. "You—"

"Say, let's let these guys go—"

"Sure, en we'll plant AG against one of the stumps."

"And leave him stew while he's gettin' an eyeful of his Ammy-Rammie!"

XI

THE GREEN MASK

With steadily rising hope the four captives listened and watched the change come over the majority of their captors and their growing disposition to believe what the De Castros had to say about the mythical tales of Ynca treasure hidden in the Andes. Eagerly they saw the dissension flare up between the gang and young Gordon, until the proposal was made to set the prisoners free and take their disappointment out on the man who had brought them on a fool's mission.

"Let him stew in his own juice," snarled one of the men.

"We ain't got no row with these guys. Let 'em go," ordered another.

"Will you promise to keep your traps shut till we're out of the country?" one of them demanded cautiously.

"Certainly. I'll do more than that, with pleasure. I can see that you were badly misled in the enterprise and will do anything I can to help you leave Peru without difficulty," De Castro promised. "I have no small amount of influence."

"All right, old man." The chap nearest Jim hauled out a knife and started to slash away at the ropes which bound his feet.

"You heard what that guy said. You ain't doing no double-crossin'?"

"We'll all keep the agreement Mr. De Castro has made," Austin assured him without hesitation. He could feel the ropes ease about his ankles and whistled softly at the anticipated relief.

"Blast you for a lot of fools—" Gordon thundered.

"You better go easy with your trap," one of the men snapped.

"We ain't takin' any more foolishness from you," was a second declaration of independence. The men gathered with threatening tones toward Gordon, who was white with rage and probably no small amount of terror.

"I tell you that I know what I'm talking about. I found a paper in an old hiding place on our ranch in Texas—" he bellowed.

"Oh, you did, and what did it say?"

"He's stallin' ter save his hide."

"It was a sketch of the Andes—a long rough one, and a figure S was circled, with Amy-Ran spelled out, and down in one corner was written, 'treasure,' " he snapped.

"En how did it get on the ranch in Texas?" a skeptic demanded.

"I don't know that. The old families that had the place before we did used dug-outs for root cellars, and the earliest ones made places in which they could hide from Indian attacks, or cattlemen's fights. Places to keep the women and children. There was such a place on our ranch but it had been built so long ago that it was forgotten. I happened to find it. There were a lot of cubby holes, most of them were empty, but in a couple there were old record books, and some kid's copy books. I found the paper between the pages of one of those and I came here until I found the S plateau with the Indian stones on top."

"Well, let's have a look at the paper." The chap who had cut the ropes on Jim's feet dropped his knife and joined the group.

"I haven't got it," Gordon had to admit.

"What happened to it?" was the relentless demand.

"I know this is the place the organization has been trying to find for years," Arthur evaded. "And we are here."

"Let's see the paper."

"I haven't got it," he shouted. "I lost it."

"Where?" Their interest and belief was vanishing, and Gordon was getting pressed toward the wall.

"I was on top one day. Got a couple of Indians to help me up. That was when I found those kids." He nodded toward the Flying Buddies still painfully roped to the stumps. "Our chauffeur came with me, and those kids were nosing around. We tried to get rid of them but that Indian brat and his uncle came butting in."

"He's lyin'," one snapped.

"He was here all right because he just asked the kid about it," another injected. "He was here, just him and his chauffeur,

trying to find the treasure—enough to buy Chicago en he was going to get the works fer himself, but somebody spoiled his game."

"Yeh, now. Then he collects us, gives us a big story 'bout comin' and findin' it with him when he can't get it alone. He gits the idea that kid knows the secret and he fixes up the scheme to make 'em tell."

"Maybe the kid knows—" one suggested.

"I tell you he does," Gordon was quick to seize the slight advantage.

"Go on! Suppose he'd sit there en let you shoot his pals! He'd tell something. Their stories hang together—this guy's don't. Come on, give him plenty." They poked their heads forward, fists clenched, and circled in until their outstretched hands almost touched Gordon. With a wild yell he leaped high, his heavy shoes kicking vigorously as he went over them, landing on one man who fell under the impact, then he struck out with his fists. The maddened gang snarled as they whirled, guns were whipped out, but Arthur's were in his hands now.

"I'll shoot blazes out of every last one of you. Hold up your hands," he ordered.

"To hell with you." A rock was sent sailing and a gun barked.

"Listen," someone shrieked above the din. "There's a plane coming. Hear it." They paused an instant, and high above their heads circled a green plane. The captives tried to see it, and then Jim, fearing the men would not complete the job of cutting his ropes, raised his foot, and after very careful maneuvering, managed to get the heavy knife up close to his body, then he struggled to work one arm forward, hoping to reach the weapon with his fingers.

"That's the Big Gun's crate," one of the gang announced.

"Yah, and he ain't going to give us no welcome-on-the-mat sign," another added.

They were all looking upward and knew that they were sighted by the descending machine. Gordon gave a hasty glance about, took advantage of the fact that the men's attention was elsewhere, slipped stealthily around the curve in the rock and disappeared. A moment later the roar of his engine broke the silence. Two of the men ran after him, but the plane had left the ground

and was climbing swiftly. Jim caught a fleeting glimpse of it as it tore through the air directly over the one that was gliding down. By that time the boy had managed to wriggle his arm forward, he squirmed and twisted and at last the heavy knife was in his fingers, but part of his hand was held firmly by the rope and he could barely grasp it.

"They're down." Disregarding the prisoners the men crowded around the rock in the direction the second plane was landing.

"Are you loose, Buddy?" Bob whispered tensely.

"No. He cut the rope on my feet but not the one that goes around my body," Austin replied softly. He struggled desperately to work the blade up under the rope, but it was an exasperatingly slow process. His efforts were more and more painful but he gritted his teeth grimly, even though he felt as if every move he made cut his flesh all over. The blade of the knife slid around away from the ropes, but finally he managed to get the end of the handle on his palm, closed his fingers enough to hold it, then began to

work it up and down through the thick strands of the coarse hemp.

From beyond the rocks came the sound of greetings and curt orders and then unhurried steps which marked the return of the men with the "Big Gun" as they had called him. By that time the knife in Jim's hand had finished its work and the boy hastily tucked the end of the severed rope under a fold of his flying suit. He was able to work his wrist, and with a soft whistle he gave the weapon a vigorous push and sent it toward Caldwell, who promptly raised his knees enough to admit it, then dropped them quickly concealing the treasure. With a soft sigh of relief, Jim squirmed his body until the ropes were loosened enough to make them less unbearable, but not sufficient to be noticed by their captors, whose next move was problematical. It had flashed into Austin's mind to leap up and free his companions, but he promptly dismissed the idea. There wasn't time to get them cut, and after they were cut, it would take some little time for them to limber their stiffened joints and get their tortured bodies in a condition to

move at all easily. If Bob could cut himself loose and hand over the knife to Carlos, who was close beside him, then on to the older man, they would all be in a position to act successfully if the opportunity came.

"Perhaps I'm a grand little pipe dreamer," Jim told himself, but he didn't give up the idea of trying his darndest to find a way out of the dilemma. He could see Bob busy struggling with the knife and taking advantage of the precious minutes as hard as he could, although his face was drawn with the pain he was inflicting upon himself.

"Here's the place we're camping." The first of the gang reappeared around the rock and with a nervous, half sweeping gesture, designated the refuge. Behind him was a tall, well built man in a dark green flying suit. His helmet was drawn close, the goggles covered his eyes, and the rest of his face was concealed by a green mask, which disappeared below his collar. Instead of the usual gauntlets, he wore close-fitting green gloves, the style women wear with evening dress, only instead of having them extend smoothly up his arm, they were drawn above

his coat sleeves in wrinkles. His trousers were tucked into fine-made green boots. A second man accompanied him, but he was not so picturesquely costumed. He wore the conventional flying suit of a dark tan and grey mixture and instead of the green mask he had tied a black silk kerchief over the lower part of his face and his collar was turned high. This fellow was also of large build but considerably stouter than his companion.

In a minute the entire band was back in the opening, and all but the latest arrivals showed their extreme nervousness. To work some of it off, a couple threw wood on the fire and stirred it up, while a third opened the roll of camp equipment, produced a torch which he lighted and stuck up close to the wall. It made queer shadows dance about wierdly in the steadily fading daylight. It was evident that the one in green was a mighty "big boss," for the rest seemed to hold their breaths as they waited for him to speak. He seemed in no hurry to do so, but looked them over intently, took a survey of the camp, barely glanced at the captives,

and finally seated himself on a piece of log as if he was to pronounce judgment. His eyes rested on one of the men for almost a minute.

"Who went off in that plane?" he began with biting coldness.

"Arthur Gordon."

"How did you happen to be in this place?" was the next question.

"Gordon said he knew where to find the Indian gold and for me to round the boys up and help him get it."

"Did he show you any signed order?"

"I asked him for it. He said he had it all right but it was in his other clothes, and that you were in a hurry to get the work done before the Peruvian government got wind of it and made trouble. He outlined his plan, and told me to carry it through; to work fast. That you were likely to land down here any minute. A couple of the fellows wouldn't come, and the others objected to Gordon, but we did the job for him and he showed up a couple of hours after it was finished," the man explained.

"Did he show you an order then?"

"No."

"What was the job?"

"To get that kid. We couldn't land him alone so we took the bunch instead of waiting, because Gordon said they would be leaving for Texas in a day or two and we couldn't wait." He nodded toward Jim, who sat with his head hanging forward on his chest as if he were about to pass out with exhaustion.

"How was it done?"

"Fixed the plane and brought them here." The fellow went on with the details of the scheme and a description of what had followed, including all of the questions he could remember. Altogether he gave a pretty complete account to which the green mask listened without apparently moving a muscle.

"What were the rings that were taken? Who has them?" he demanded.

"The wop and his side-kick."

"Bring them up." The two were shoved hastily forward, but now instead of standing impudently they both cringed before the inquisitor. "Put the rings here." He desig-

nated the end of the log seat, and without a murmur the two green emeralds were laid before the eyes of the Big Gun, who moved slightly away from them as if he expected to be caught in some magic spell by just looking at them.

"Is this all that was taken?"

"Yes."

"Put them back where they were found, quick." It was the little man who had started to release Jim, who sprang to obey. He fumbled for the boy's hand, too terrified to notice that the prisoner was no longer secured, and in a moment the ring was on its owner's finger. The second he took to Bob and performed a like service. Until it was accomplished there wasn't a sound except the labored breathing of the anxious gang, and the sighing of the wind from the forest that surrounded them.

"They're back," the little man chattered.

"They're back, Boss," repeated the "Wop" who was still standing before the inquisitor. The two men who waited their sentence put out supplicating hands.

"Every man who joins this organization is

taught several things. The first and most important is absolute obedience to rules and orders," the green mask reminded them in peculiarly cold, even tones. "One general rule that is known to everybody is that orders are to be obeyed implicitly and on the instant." He paused as if to let his words sink into the brains of the men about him. Then he went on. "From his very first admission into the organization each member is told that every enterprise must be on a share basis. There is no working alone or on the side."

"We wasn'—"

"And there is to be no private looting by individuals or groups. We are after big things and we intend to get them, but nothing is too small to be added to the pool and nothing must be held out. Another thing, members are warned repeatedly not to touch green emerald rings; no matter who is wearing them; not even a dead man."

"I didn't know they were emeralds," the "side-kick" whimpered.

"You could see that they were green. You disobeyed orders and appropriated the rings

even though you were reminded to leave them alone. You are untrustworthy and not co-operative."

He paused again, but no one said a word, no one seemed to dare to break the awful silence, then he calmly drew out a small, pearl handled gun. Instantly it spat crankily, was followed by a cry of pain from one man, a shriek of terror from the other as he dropped to his knees, then a second shot. The two bodies tumbled over each other, quivered and were still. A couple of men nearest them dragged them beyond the rim of the camp, then returned, their hands trembling.

The four captives watching this ghastly drama enacted in the heart of the Andes, were sickened with horror, and every vestige of hope that they would be released by their captors vanished from the Flying Buddies' brains. The man in the green mask would never permit anyone to go free and tell what he knew or had witnessed. Desperately Jim tried to think up a workable plan of escape, but the odds against their getting away were ten million to one on a rough estimate; probably higher. Glancing at Bob,

he was sure that Caldwell had managed to cut his ropes and had passed the knife on to Carlos, but the elder De Castro gave a low moan, his head slumped forward in a dead faint. That dropped their chances to an even lower rate. Just then the man began to speak again and this time his remarks were addressed to the chap who had carried out Gordon's orders. The fellow's face was a sickly yellow, his knees shook, and his hands worked as he tried to face his fate, whatever it might be.

"You know that no one is to take orders that are not properly signed." The smoking gun was in his hand as he spoke. "Even an order from me must be counter-signed by my brother. You have always understood that."

"Yes, and I've always obeyed it, Chief. You've never had no come-back on me. This lad Gordon stands higher than I do. He comes along with this job; we're thousands of miles from everything, and he tells me that you are on your way here. That the job has to be done and every minute is precious, delay may cost us the whole works, every-

thing the organization has been after for years. He puts it so strong I don't dare pass it up. He promised to be here, then doesn't show up for three hours. We're all good and suspicious of him by that time, then we see the green plane. At any rate he knew you were coming and we looked for the razz because we hadn't got nowhere, en he lights out leavin' us to hold the bag." The Chief, or Big Gun, whatever he was, sat for a moment without making any reply, and he semed to bore the man with his eyes. "I'm telling you the God's truth," he added.

"Gordon has been raised in the ranks because he has a capacity for figuring out schemes that are almost as devilish as my brother's own, but he has proved his unworthiness and we'll go after him. Now, regarding you, as you say, there have been no previous come-backs against you; your record is fair. Gordon was given no orders whatsoever, he may have guessed I was coming, but he did not know. I didn't myself until the word came that he had something down here and was starting on his own. The two chaps in Lima told me where you had

headed, that's how I found you." He paused again, then slipped the gun back into his belt.

"Yes, Chief." The man straightened a bit and ventured to mop his forehead, which was beaded with perspiration.

"I'll look after things here for the present. You will go on to Lima, join the two boys, and take the line for New York. The reservation is made for three. Rig yourselves up, and get on that airship tomorrow. They are carrying a valuable piece of jewelry, an Archduchess' diamond necklace. It was sent from Vienna to New York to sell without breaking up, but they couldn't find a buyer, so they submitted it to a jeweler down here. He can't sell it either, so it goes back. It's carried by a jeweler, a bank detective and a New York City flat-foot. You're to put the bunch to sleep and get the thing. The boys will give you the details."

"Thanks, Chief."

"It's against our principles to give a man a second chance to make good, so if you make a flop of this job, you may as well jump into the ocean in the deepest part and stay there,

for we'll get you if you don't. Those stones alone are worth sixty thousand dollars."

"I'll get 'em," the fellow promised. His tone was a bit high-pitched and the color began to come back to his face. He glanced uncertainly at the captives, but the chief disregarded them. The man with the black kerchief had rested his eyes on them occasionally, but he evidently realized the importance of keeping his mouth shut until he was asked to speak.

"Got anything to eat here?" the Chief inquired.

"We can fix you up a snack," someone offered eagerly. More fuel was thrown on the fire, it blazed up, and the camp equipment was unrolled. The chap with the green mask sat, one ankle crossed over his knee, and he might have been absolutely alone for all the attention he paid to any of his companions. They all moved about stealthily, but the worst of the strain was over.

XII

THE VOLCANO

The fragrance of the "snack" prepared for the chief and his companion was horribly tantalizing to the nostrils of the three boys who dared not reveal the fact that they could move, nor did they venture to hazard a word with one another, although Carlos and Bob might have done so for their stumps were close together.

From time to time the De Castro boy glanced anxiously at his unconscious father. As night came on, he might, by moving very carefully, cut the ropes which secured the older man, but the young fellow feared that at the unexpected easing of his bonds, his dad would tumble over or make some sound and betray their secret; lessen their very slender chance of escape. Another thing

which occurred to the boy was that while his father remained unaware of what was happening, he was certainly suffering less.

When the meal was ready it was served deferentially and with many apologies for its meagerness and the lack of china. The man with the green mask nodded his acceptance of things as they were, adapted himself to the conditions and was not inconsiderate, while his companion helped himself to what he wanted without comment, not even a word of thanks. His kerchief did not lend itself to the performance and he was forced to lower it below his lips while he ate, but he kept his collar high, and sat with his back to the prisoners.

The pair ate deliberately while the gang kept at a respectful distance. No one ventured to suggest that the men roped just within the camp line must be hungry and thirsty nor to offer any of them a mouthful. By the time the things were cleared away, it was quite late. When he dared to glance up, Jim saw the stars blinking, and presently the moon was flooding the heavens with a brilliant silver light that streamed kindly

on the little globe. The leader, when he had finished, lighted a cigar, settled himself as comfortably as possible and smoked in silence.

Austin tried to watch every move and he wondered how long they would be kept waiting before the pearl-handled pistol was taken out again, its blunt nose pointed at them, and its deadly shells sending bullets through their brains. No one showed any disposition either to depart or settle down for the night and he was sure they were waiting the pleasure of their costumed leader. Jim reasoned quite logically that if they were not dispatched before morning the gang would camp for the night, a guard would surely be placed, and there wasn't a chance in the world that some one would not take the precaution to examine the ropes. The severed ends would be discovered—he didn't want to carry the thought any further.

Pedro De Castro's condition put an immediate break for liberty quite out of the question. They simply had to stay with him at any cost. Looking at the scene in front of him, Jim was reminded of a stage setting.

It was surprisingly like that. The actors moved about against the fantastic background in the lighted section, while out beyond stretched the dark pit and the unseen audience, which might be wild animals if any one could see. Suddenly a low rumble in the distance made a few of the gang glance up apprehensively.

"Sounds like thunder," the Green Mask remarked.

"Guess that's what it is, Chief, and a thunder storm in these mountains is the dirtiest thing you ever saw," his lieutenant answered.

"This spot appears protected."

"It is and it's pretty dry."

"We'll stay for the night." That remark settled the question in all of their minds, and they relaxed somewhat.

The chief finished his cigar, rose slowly and started to walk across the camp. His companion, after adjusting his black kerchief, followed, and together the pair approached the prisoners, not stopping until they were in front of Pedro De Castro. The one in the black mask stooped, caught the

man's hair, jerked back his head and stared intently into the white face. Then he doubled his fist and swung back to strike his helpless victim.

"Silvester, why do you always indulge in such childish displays? You can see that he's unconscious, if you can see anything. You'll merely knock him more so and batter your knuckles," the chief drawled.

"Damn him," Silvester growled.

"What satisfaction does that give you? But you really ought to be very grateful to young Gordon for getting him into your clutches. Don't waste energy on the sort of retaliation that a spoiled boy would scorn." Silvester's hands dropped as if they had been stung and he growled,

"Well, I'm glad he's here."

"You ought to be. It is evident that Arthur was more clever at accomplishing things and unraveling secrets than you are, and you've been at work here for years."

"The fellow blundered into something—" Silvester snarled. There was no mistaking that voice, even if the given-name had not been spoken, and the three boys who heard

could hardly keep their heads down and not betray themselves.

"He seems to have a great nose for spotting things, the right ones. I think it's rather a pity we can't keep him on the staff, but he is an individualist, the kind that kicks over traces, so we'll have to get along without him. I think he was right in his calculation that this place is the stronghold we're looking for. The first thing in the morning we'll start a thorough search."

"I can't be away from the city too long," Silvester Alonzo announced.

"No?"

"When you arrived you said there was something that your brother wanted to know. What is it?"

"Oh, yes, we've been rather occupied and didn't get a chance to broach the subject. It's several questions. My brother wants to know for instance, why, when he gave you a most complete, detailed course of action to follow in regard to that organization, why didn't you and Vaca carry it through. Why did you permit yourselves to be shoved off onto the ice, as it were?"

"I've sent an explanation to him," Alonzo snapped.

"He wasn't exactly satisfied with it."

"I told him this fellow here stalled along, then got Austin on the hop down here. We tried our damndest to stop him, but didn't succeed, and he lands there the day of the meeting."

"And the members you reported half dead were also among those present. Then the next thing, dozens of carefully picked men, holding positions which are valuable to us, were fired within an hour. Furthermore, a coop of particularly fine homing pigeons is nailed up and gun-traps set over it. Someone must have been acting incautiously, to say the least; things must have been managed very badly to arouse such strong opposition. What was it? Who is the spy or bungler?"

"How the hell should I know?" Silvester snapped.

"I shall have to ask you to remember, please, to whom you are speaking. I happen to be the man who put you in the way of several very lucrative deals, and I might

also remind you that I am the man who kept the pair of you out of prison." The tone was icy cold and Silvester's huge body shivered as he tried to hold himself together.

"Nobody's denying all that, but, dammit, you seem to forget that you have an audience. The chances are that at least some of them are not so unconscious as they make out," he answered, but his manner was changed.

"And they are not so unconscious as they will be. I am not in the habit of running needless risk," was the sharp retort.

This last remark told the Flying Buddies where they might expect to get off, and how, but as they had listened they marveled at the speed of the news items to reach headquarters, wherever it was, and the promptness of the arrival of this man to investigate. Just then another rumble was heard, much closer than the first, and a moment later the unmistakable roar of an airplane motor that was certainly coming in their direction at a good speed.

"Who the blazes is that?" Alonzo snarled.

"Douse the lights," the man in green called sharply.

The order was carried out instantly with anything that happened to be wet. The plane continued to roar at a high speed-rate, but it did not seem to approach very quickly. Everybody was straining his eyes to find it, but not a glimpse did they get of a racing light. Tensely they watched and listened, but the machine did not pass over them, and they were unable to locate it.

"In places like this, continuous sound is picked up by the echoes and re-echoed in a queer way. It probably isn't as close as it seems to be," Silvester volunteered softly.

"You don't happen to be doing anything funny do you?" The question was put quietly, but the pearl-handled gun shone in the palm of the man with the green mask.

"My God, no, I swear it," Silvester answered and his teeth chattered.

"You needn't swear. We may as well get some sleep while—" He stopped short as a mighty rumble issued from the great cliff opposite where they were standing. It was repeated three times at brief intervals, each

louder than the last, then the earth under them quivered, shook, seemed to tip, then shook more violently.

"It-it's an earthquake," some one cried hoarsely, but a second later, the darkness was dispelled by a blaze of light that split it open to heaven itself. A great cone of fire shot high, issuing enormous clouds of smoke that belched forth in a rolling mass and looked as if they were laden with rocks and mud. Then, down the side of the cliff poured a fall of the mass which dropped with lightning speed, and started to flood the entire vicinity.

"It's a volcano," someone cried out in terror.

"Look out—"

"Run for your lives!"

"We'll be burned alive!"

"Run!" Pandemonium was loose. Cursing and swearing the men ran in every direction. One dashed directly into the wall, another stumbled over the collection of camp equipment, sending the utensils clattering, and another just stood in the one spot, his body bent forward, his feet racing and his

hands clawing the air as if he thought he were racing at full speed. Someone leaped into him, propelling him forward.

"Come on, come on." The Chief, Silvester and the gang fought their way madly toward the ledge, tumbling over themselves to get around it, then scrambled toward the planes. Above the din of the eruption, and the terrified scream of panicky men, came the sound of the motors and a second later the two planes were in the air, tearing as hard as their crowded pilots could shove them, while desperate men clung to the braces, and others kicked them off to the rocks below.

"My father," sobbed Carlos, then his own head wobbled and he slumped in a faint.

As Jim sat watching the amazing spectacle, too dazed at its suddenness to try to escape, he suddenly became conscious of an odd tingling sensation that ran through his whole body. He scowled, then his lips parted.

"Buddy, we've got to get out of here!" Bob shouted, and whipped the ropes from around his body. His eyes happened to rest on Jim, his own mouth opened and he stared

in wonder, but after that he made no move.

In a minute one of the rocks they were facing moved smoothly inward and from the opening emerged Ynilea, wearing the laboratory uniform. He stepped quickly to the elder De Castro, slashed the ropes, and felt the man's pulse, then Carlos'. He glanced about the absolutely deserted camp, saw a couple of tin cups, which he half filled with water and added something from a vial. That done, he turned to the Flying Buddies.

"You're all right, now. Later, give them this. It will set them up again. We'll see that you reach home safely. I'll help you get them to the 'Lark,' " he said briskly.

"The Lark?" Bob gasped.

"Yes, we brought it for you, but we had to get rid of the others. How do you like our little display?" he grinned.

"Corking, what I saw of it," Bob replied.

"Take a look at it now. It's an invention of my own and I'm rather proud of it." The Flying Buddies turned and viewed the terrifying sight which certainly appeared like a perfectly good volcano having a wild celebration.

"Looks like Vesuvius with St. Vitus dance," Caldwell announced. "How did you do it?"

"The rumble was the work of motors, of course. The sound is amplified and thrown back of the cliff. A bit of fire is real, real as the sparklers children use on the Fourth of July, the smoke is a simple matter, and the rest is lights. Add to that the darkness, wilderness, the mysterious plane, and the terror our friend in green struck into the hearts of everybody. He helped us no end," Ynilea explained obligingly.

"And the earthquake effect was produced by really wriggling these stones," Jim added.

"Sure. The spot Gordon selected was particularly adapted to the success of the entertainment, as it were."

"How long are you going to keep it up?"

"A few minutes more. Enough to prevent any idea of returning to this spot for a while."

"Gosh, when those fellows in the planes look back, they won't stop this side of Alaska," Austin laughed.

"Sorry that I had to nail you fast for a minute, but I didn't want you running off with the gang. I knew that you would recognize the tingle and not be frightened."

"I didn't recognize it," Bob said, "But Buddy had told me how it felt, so when I saw him sitting cool as a cake of ice, I stopped trying to struggle loose. I say, they think that treasure is here—"

"They are welcome to search. There hasn't been a thin dime's worth here in two hundred years. Our people realized that the stones on top of what the Spaniards called Amy-Ran would attract speculation and eventually the place would become the subject of an exhaustive search, so the temple was never finished. Everything that was here was removed, except a few odds and ends which work the stones when we want to open them."

"Could searchers, if they got inside, work the stones—find the way it is done?" Jim asked.

"No, because it's a development of the stones themselves and no matter what posi-

tion they are in, they conceal their own mechanism. You boys feel all right?"

"Fine as silk. I say, how did you discover we were in such a hole? We didn't have any hope of you because we were not in the 'Lark'?" Austin wanted to know.

"Every one of the green emerald rings that are being worn by our friends is recorded in the laboratories and the records are watched. When one passes from the finger of the real owner to an alien hand (or pocket) it sets up a vibration. We start an investigation to know what is happening. The girl discovered that your two rings were in a halo of scarlet; she notified the investigator; he found you tied up here, so we went to work. We were prepared to protect you at any time in case things got too hot for you, but we wanted to wait until dark for this particular program, as we thought it would be the most effective in the long run. Come, I'll help with these chaps, then you give them the drink."

The bonds of Pedro De Castro had been cut while the man talked, and the Flying Buddies unwound Carlos. The man was

picked up as if he were no more than a baby, and the two boys managed to get their South American pal on an "arm chair" they made by joining hands, and presently they were in the rear cock-pit of the "Lark." The little plane looked mighty good to the boys, but they felt a tinge of regret that the De Castro plane had been stolen.

"Oh-mi-gosh," Jim said suddenly. "Those fellows planned a hold up on the air line to New York. Shall we notify the police here or will you do something?"

"Notify the authorities by all means."

"Gee, I'd almost forgotten it. They are going to steal the Archduchess' necklace on its way back to New York," Bob explained.

"Get in touch with the authorities; Carlos De Castro can tell you who they are. The man may be too shaken after tonight to try to carry out the robbery, but we won't take a chance on that, and it may give the police an opportunity to capture some more of the gang."

"All right."

"Gee, we're much obliged—"

"Don't mention it," Ynilea cut them short.

"I'll give these fellows the drink and you get up in front. Just sit quietly and don't touch anything."

The Sky Buddies lost no time in carrying out the instructions and presently the motor was running smoothly. The "Lark" lifted, and as they climbed they waved to Ynilea, who returned the salute. As they shot up, both boys turned with keen interest to get a good view of the artificially made-to-order volcano, but it was not especially terrifying. Nevertheless they appreciated the work it had accomplished for them. Although they looked about the heavens, there wasn't another plane in sight, and shortly they were headed in a bee-line for home.

Before they reached the De Castros, the two in the back had recovered, so they were able to help themselves when the "Lark" had made a sweet landing. The party were mighty sore from the bonds, especially the man, and they were all as hungry as bears, a condition they relieved without delay. Carlos telephoned to the local authorities and warned them of the pending jewel robbery on the north-bound air-line. Finally they

were all in their rooms getting ready for bed, almost too weary to undress.

"I say, Buddy, did this shoot you up much?" Jim asked anxiously.

"No, I'll be fit as a fiddle in the morning," Bob declared positively.

"Goodnight."

It was almost evening before any of them were astir the next day, and when they had finished their meal, a friend of the family appeared so bursting with news that he nearly popped his vest buttons. He talked so fast in Spanish that the Flying Buddies thought war was declared. Finally Carlos interpreted for them.

"Last night there was an eruption from the end of Amy-Ran. That's the first news. Second, three men were captured trying to take sleeping gas and guns on the plane carrying the Archduchess' diamond necklace. Third; this is fair, the brothers Alonzo have been put into bankruptcy by their creditors. Fourth; and this is choice, Silvester, a guest from the U. S. and a pilot were trying out a new plane. It did a tail spin. The pilot was least hurt; he got help to the

others, Silvester got off with a broken collar-bone, a couple of ribs and a leg. The U. S.-er, was killed. Can they do any better than that in one morning in Texas?"

"Oh, this is a dull place," Bob laughed.

"Any self respecting Texas plane would have done a better job," said Jim. Later, when the newsbearing guest had taken his departure, the elder De Castro looked at the Flying Buddies.

"I am mystified still as to how you boys managed to carry me and my son to the plane and out of danger. We were dead weights," he said.

"I can tell you," Carlos spoke up. "When a fellow is in a fix like that, he has to do something, disregard the odds. The Buddies wouldn't leave us, so they got us out, that's all, but they couldn't tell how they did it, not in so many words. See Father!"

"Yes, yes, I think so. I recall many strange things being done under great stress or need. It is a help one is given, a reserve for emergencies," he answered gravely. The Buddies were mighty grateful that he didn't inquire further and ask how the "Lark" got there.

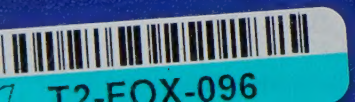
Carlos was called away to the telephone, so the discussion was dropped.

"Let's have a look at the pups," Bob proposed. They excused themselves to their host, who was meditating soberly on the evils of men, and thankfully on their remarkable escape.

"It's a shame that Silvester is such a tough nut," Jim remarked regretfully, and he picked up one of the tiny dogs.

"Capering Catfish, some day he'll do an Achilles," Bob declared emphatically.

THE END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